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OUR PLEA FOR UNION

AND THE

PRESENT CRISIS

BY
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THE CHRISTIAN CENTURY COMPANY
385 DEARBORN STREET
CHICAGO.

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FOREWORD.

A crisis is a culmination and a beginning. It is a moment when some forces come to their mature expression and others first appear. It is an hour when there occurs a change of front. It is a day of opportunity. It may be marked by features which give it a definite and unmistakable character, so that none can fail to recognize either its importance or the moment of its climax. Such was the nature of that day in which Bismarck sent the celebrated message to Napoleon III, or the hour in which Fort Sumter was attacked, or the time set by England's ultimatum to the South African republics. But usually the crises of history are marked by no such striking features, and are seen by most people only in retrospect, if at all. The *renaissance* came on quietly, and men presently opened their eyes to discover that they were living in a new Europe, whose birth no one had beheld. The Reformation was not produced by the nailing up of the theses on the door of the Castle church at Wittenburg, though this brave act of Luther's drew the eyes of the world to the struggle. The Oath of the Tennis Court was but an episode in a movement

which was not alone the French Revolution, but, as Hugo observes, the "change of front of the universe." Choices are made and determinations reached in moments when no changes are apparent in the outward show of things. It is in the belief that the Disciples of Christ are passing through a profoundly important, and in many respects a transitional, period in their history that the following chapters have been prepared. There may be no apparent change in their work or their relations to the Christian forces around them, yet such changes are occurring, and will inevitably give direction to the future growth and influence of the movement. There are, no doubt, those who see no change, who feel that this body of people is moving satisfactorily in its appointed and inevitable course; who declare that there are no signs of change, but that since the fathers fell asleep all things continue as they were. It is with the hope that this opinion may receive careful reconsideration by the thoughtful among us; that present forces and opportunities may be wisely estimated by us; that doors now open may be entered; that hopes only partially realized may come to fruition; in a word, that we may by the grace of God serve the generation in which we live to the fullest degree, that these chapters are given their present form.

September 1.

H. L. W.

INTRODUCTION.

THE TASK OF THE NEW CENTURY.

The Disciples of Christ are old enough as a religious body to understand something of their place in the programme of American Christianity, as judged by their past career and their present standing; and no moment is more favorable for taking inventory of their position and promise than this hour, in which the two centuries meet. Are the people who comprise the membership of this communion content with the record already made? If they are, is there anything more to be sought for the future? If not content, how shall their purposes be realized?

No one will deny that much has been done. The story of the eighty years since this reformation began is thrilling. From a feeble, protesting body we have become a mighty folk. From the state of "an infant crying in the night, an infant crying for the light,"

we have grown able to speak with a voice that commands attention, if not respect, in most quarters of the church. Our machinery is becoming in an increasing degree adequate to our needs; our schools, journals, missionary and philanthropic agencies are increasingly efficient; our ministry is rising gradually to recognize its educational responsibilities and to prepare itself for the needs of the hour.

Yet the question arises, What does this million and a quarter of people propose to accomplish? Where their voice is heard in the counsels of the church at large they are understood to stand for two principles: First, the unity of the people of God; second, the restoration of the apostolic teaching and practice as the ground of such unity. These principles seem so simple and vital to us, that we do not easily understand the problems that present themselves to the man who from another angle watches our movements. He is almost certain to be struck with certain facts which are likely to escape our attention, standing, as we do, within the circle of our history and effort. Among these facts which seem clear to him, are the following: First, although we are protesting against sectarianism, we appear to be only one more among the already too numerous denominations into which the church is divided.

Second, judging from our compactness of organization and party zeal as a body, we have as much of the sect spirit as any denomination in Christendom. Some of our churches and preachers display elements of bigotry and intolerance that would have done credit to the most narrow and belligerent sect in the most polemical period of Christian history. Third, we who proclaim our zeal for Christian unity display in a majority of cases not only an indifference to its practical realization in the communities where we exist, but are actually the most reluctant to engage in efforts of a unifying character, such as union evangelistic services, efforts for civic righteousness which demand the earnest co-operation of all Christians, fraternity and comity in missionary work, both in America and on foreign soil, and such other forms of united effort as the spirit of love and fellowship would dictate.

Again, when we consider our plea for the restoration of apostolic Christianity, this outside observer is likely to maintain two things: First, that the restoration of the conditions prevailing in the apostolic churches is both impossible and undesirable. No one, he would say, wishes to go back to the faulty and imperfect church life of the first century. The plane of Christian life of our time is much higher than that of

the members of the churches in Corinth, Ephesus, Galatia and Rome. Moreover, the movement of the church is forward, not backward. The real cry of the church should be "Forward to Christ," not "Back to Christ," for our Leader is ever before us. Second, that if it be understood that it is the ideals of the apostolic church and not the actual conditions that we seek to restore, we as Disciples of Christ are no more anxious to see this end accomplished than are our religious neighbors; that they as sincerely seek to be obedient to Christ as do we, and that in the matter of being led by his spirit into the possession of the holy fruit of Christian character, it often appears that the advantage is with them rather than with us. He would say that if an earnest effort to accomplish the will of our Lord be the test of a people, we have nothing whereof to boast; and that the commendation upon those who make sincere and strenuous attempt to realize the large and essential things of Christian life rather than the small and inconsequential ends of a legal correctness which forgets the spirit of the Master in the effort to conform to the mint, anise and cumin of the Christian law, would be likely to rest upon some of our religious neighbors rather than upon us.

One need not concern himself to answer these state-

ments all in a breath. For this ample time may be taken, and it is believed that a suitable answer can be made. But the important point for consideration is: How much truth do these affirmations of our neighbors regarding us contain? And if there be any truth in them, how do we propose to remedy the situation? Upon the answer to these questions, not in the attitude of resentment of criticism, but of sincere and candid examination of the facts, rests our future. If they are true, and we make no change, we are already foredoomed to come to an early close of our period of growth and promise, and to be relegated to the limbo of useless and obsolete religious movements, while others worthier than we arise to carry forward the principles to which for a time we gave a too narrow and partisan advocacy.

CHAPTER I.

ARE THE DISCIPLES A DENOMINATION?

A man comes into most intimate acquaintance with himself in the light of criticism. A body of people may obtain like knowledge in a similar manner. It is therefore profitable for us as a people to have pointed out some of the popular impressions regarding the Disciples which one meets in conversation with those of other religious communions, and sees sometimes in religious journals other than our own. There is always instruction to be gained in getting another's view of oneself, no matter whether that view is friendly or hostile. It cannot fail to be informing, if the critic be worthy of consideration; and certainly the opinion which gains currency in religious circles regarding any particular body of people is likely to approach the truth in most respects. There may have been a time when we were "everywhere spoken against," and a fair and discriminating judgment was not to be

expected. Certainly that day has passed. We are likely to-day to receive all the respect we merit. We assume for ourselves far too important a place in public estimation if we fancy that any considerable proportion of the Christian world is persistently opposed to us. There is apparently a class of our people who imagine it is still true, but outside of rather narrow limits, within which the original antagonism against a new and unknown people persists, it has no longer a reality. In any community we are likely to be respected in proportion to our deserts, and if hostile demonstrations occur, or disparaging opinions exist, they are probably the result of causes which lie in the character and disposition of the local church, rather than in the plea or work of the Disciples in general.

What, then, are the items which enter into the opinion of the outside circle of fair-minded observers of our movement? If we have patience to listen to them and consider their value, we may learn something of the influence we are exerting upon Christian thought and of the probable success which awaits our efforts. If we should discover that certain changes in our methods of procedure are expedient, we ought not to decline such amendment. But we shall at least wish to weigh the question judicially and without passion.

Among these items the first is this: That, although we are protesting against sectarianism, we appear to be only one more among the already too numerous denominations into which the church is divided. Those of us who are most eager for freedom from all denominational trappings can hardly deny that the contention has the appearance of soundness. A denomination, as the word has come to be used in the ecclesiastical vocabulary, is a group of people with a body of beliefs differentiating it more or less clearly from other religious bodies; with a name, or perhaps a variety of names, which, either essentially or by usage, has a distinct content as applied to that body; with certain kinds of denominational machinery, such as colleges, journals, missionary and philanthropic societies or boards, answerable for their procedure to that special body, and to it alone. Wherever these elements are found in combination it will be difficult to persuade the observer that it is anything but a denomination. Now all these things are true of the Disciples of Christ, and at any other moment than when we are protesting against being called a denomination we are apparently proud of the fact. Do we not boast of our million and a quarter of members? Do we not claim to be fifth among American religious bodies? Are we not proud of our

colleges, of our missionary and philanthropic work, and of some of our journals? And even upon the question of name we are unhappily compelled to hold the same position. When we use the title "Christian Church" we always distinguish in our own minds between the universal church and our own people, and the distinction is apparent to those who hear or read. When we say "Disciples of Christ" we use a Biblical expression in the distinctive and appropriate sense imposed historically upon us. So upon all sides, so far as a merely external judgment is concerned, the contention that we are a denomination is justified.

But the real facts lie deeper down than the surface. The true answer to the question can only rise out of an understanding of our purposes. That we hold the position and carry the marks of a denomination was a necessity imposed upon us by hard experiences in our infant days. Thrust out, because of our plea for unity, from churches where we hoped to remain as helpers to the realization of new spiritual possibilities, we were compelled to live by ourselves or die. We preferred not to die. Therefore we are as we are. But denominationalism is not wholly a matter of outward position, but essentially one of purpose and motive. We believe that the great body

of the Disciples regard their separate existence as a tentative and temporary expedient, not as a permanent or desirable estate. We are looking hopefully and confidently forward to the time when we shall not exist as a fragment of the church, even with so noble and holy a plea as we proclaim, but as parts of that undivided totality, which is the body of Christ. Nor do we expect that this consummation will be reached by the absorption of our religious neighbors into "our church," but by the pervasion of the whole brotherhood of believers with the spirit of the Master, so that, as at first, the multitude of them that believe shall be of one heart and of one soul, neither shall any of them say that the things he possesses are his own; but they shall have all things in common.

That man is foolish who stops to contend over the question as to whether or not we are a denomination. All his protestations will avail little if the spirit of denominational pride and possession characterizes us. To all his careful reasonings on the subject the outside observer, like Gallio, will be apt to reply impatiently: "If it be a question of words and names and of your opinions, look ye to it; for I will be no judge of such matters."

To the man who regards our legitimate work as the

enlargement and consolidation of a religious organization, with distinctive watchwords, separate machinery and a spirit of eager endeavor to obtain prestige and place as a body of Christians among others of similar sort—to that man we are a denomination, in the worst sense of the term, though he may attempt most earnestly of all to deny the fact. While to the one who sees our work to be that of a group of people calling the attention of the church to two great and neglected truths, the necessity for unity among the people of God and the apostolic programme as the only basis of that union, and willing to suffer the reproach of separatism only for the time and as a means to the great ends sought—to such a man we can never appear to be a denomination, but only a voice, like John of old, proclaiming the coming of the kingdom of God, and denouncing the sins which hinder its realization.

CHAPTER II.

HAVE WE THE SECT SPIRIT?

The gift of seeing ourselves as others see us is not granted to all mortals, but some are fortunate enough to learn something of themselves from their friends, whose candor supplies what would otherwise be lacking. It has already been remarked that certain things are affirmed of the Disciples and their work by people who stand outside our circle, and whose opinions are entitled to respect. The first of the statements to the effect that, although protesting against denomination-ism, we apparently have added another to the divisions of the church, is followed by a second.

It is, in effect, the charge that, judging from our compactness of organization and our party zeal as a body, we have as much of the sect spirit as any denomination in Christendom. The point is made that some of our churches and preachers display elements of bigotry and intolerance that would have done

credit to the most narrow and belligerent sect in the most polemical period of Christian history. We are ready to acknowledge that if judgment of the whole were to be formed by inspection of some of the parts, the people known as the Disciples of Christ might have to rest under the reproach of this censure. We are compelled to confess with shame that some of our churches and preachers apparently possess the very character described. We have seen men who called themselves Disciples whose only conception of loyalty to the gospel appeared to be a fervent desire to attack every form of Christian teaching that differed by a hair's breadth from that which they had been accustomed to believe; who could not understand how any man could be a follower of our Lord and hold views different in any degree from their own. To them all the churches not of our "faith and order" were so many breeders of error in the community, and it was just as essential to save a man from the thralldom of Methodism or the darkness of Presbyterianism as from infidelity or Mohammedanism. There have been men of this type in our ranks. Unfortunately their race is not yet extinct.

But one should be charitable enough to inquire as to the genesis of this spirit of intolerance in some few

sections of our brotherhood; for those who perceive the unchristian nature of such a spirit, and its obstructive influence upon all efforts toward the unity of God's people, might be puzzled to account for such theological pugilism in a people professing to represent the spirit of harmony and union. The explanation is perhaps to be found in part in the style of propaganda with which this reformation began. The ears of the religious world were heavy and their eyes they had closed. The individualism of the eighteenth century had wrought its natural results in a spirit of sectism, division and suspicion which had scattered Europe and America with the fragments of the dismembered body of Christ. When the Campbells, father and son, and their co-laborers, began their plea for the union of these sundered circles of Christians, their words seemed like idle tales. Ephraim was joined to his idols. He was content to feed upon the east wind. Nothing less than a message of flame and words of fire could be sufficient for such things. The reformers hurled stones when the flinging of grass was seen to be ineffectual to make the saucy boys in the tree of sectarian zeal listen to reason. The "Christian Baptist" was issued, and its pages were full of thunder. Its attacks upon the ecclesiastical arrogance and pride of

the time were tremendous. It left unsounded no note of warning against priestcraft and delusion in the church, both Protestant and Roman. The effect was instantaneous. The spirit of antagonism was roused. The giant, thus prodded in the eye while sleeping, rose up with a roar to find and destroy the intrepid Ulysses and his band. The fight waxed hot. Many were drawn by their sympathies to the side of the reformers, and the movement against an unscriptural and divided orthodoxy grew in numbers and power.

But Mr. Campbell wisely saw that the very struggle itself, necessary as it had been, was breeding a generation of fighters who loved the camp, the field and the carnage, but pined and became useless in peaceful life. He saw that the "Christian Baptist," by its polemical tone, had contributed to this result, and unwilling to continue a work which trained mere fighters and debaters, he discontinued that organ and began the publication of another paper, the "Millennial Harbinger," whose tone was far more constructive and pacific. Mr. Campbell never ceased to defend the truth by voice and in sermon, address and debate; but the words of his later and riper years were devoted to emphasis upon the essentials of Christian culture, such as the study of the Bible, the character and

functions of the church, the redemptive work of Christ, Christian education and the evangelization of the world.

Now the trouble with the narrow, belligerent and bigoted people in our ranks, who are always talking about "the sects" and yet are themselves giving the best example of the sect spirit, is that they have not grown with the growth of this reformation. They are living back in the first and necessarily warlike period of our history. They are not aware that the "Christian Baptist" is no longer published, and that its spirit, occasionally met in some belated freak of religious journalism, ought to be suffered to depart in peace. The "Christian Baptist," in its own day, meeting the issues of its generation, was a strong, timely and respect-compelling journal. Its small modern imitators, who have all its spirit of antagonism with none of its breadth of view or loftiness of purpose, are only grotesque.

To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under heaven; a time to be born, and a time to die; a time to kill and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; a time to cast stones, and a time to gather stones together. If we learn the lesson of the wise man we shall understand

that the spirit of the iconoclast cannot abide. Elijah has his work, but Elisha must follow. The rubbish must be cleared away, but only that the house may be built. One cannot always be slaying the prophets of Baal; and even Elijah had to be taught that it was not by tempest, earthquake or fire that God wrought, but by the still, small voice.

We believe the Disciples are rapidly leaving behind them these necessary but now outworn features of their beginnings. We want no surrender of any truth. We wish no compromise with the spirit of sectism. We will abide no lukewarm, loose, limp and lavender liberalism which surrenders where it should defend. But we hail the growth in our ranks of a larger faith in the earnest and sincere purpose of all who bear the name of Christ to obey him and exhibit his spirit; we rejoice in the growing "love that thinketh no evil," and the increasing disposition manifested by our most successful and representative men to "speak the truth," and also, which is quite as essential, to speak it "in love." We shall be taken seriously by the religious world just so soon, and only so soon, as we manifest in our conduct toward all men that love which, while honest and fearless, is at the same time the secret of harmony and the means of reaching the unity for which we ever pray.

CHAPTER III.

DO THE DISCIPLES DESIRE CHRISTIAN UNION?

It has been the endeavor of these pages to consider certain judgments which have apparently been formed in the minds of our religious neighbors regarding us, and to understand, if possible, their origin and justice. One may not believe that these opinions reflect the character of a large and growing section of our brotherhood; but on the other hand, it is apparent that, regarding some of our people, they are justified. Having given attention to two such sentiments, which hold the Disciples deserving of rebuke for being as much a denomination as any others and for exhibiting elements of narrowness and bigotry quite out of harmony with our plea, a third waits consideration which may be expressed as follows: We, who proclaim our zeal for Christian unity, display in a majority of cases not only an indifference to its practical realization in the communities where we have representation, but are actual-

ly the most reluctant to engage in efforts of a unifying sort, such as union evangelistic services, efforts for civic righteousness which demand the earnest cooperation of all Christians, fraternity and comity in missionary labors, both in America and on foreign soil, and such other forms of united effort as the spirit of love and fellowship would suggest.

It is very easy for one who is criticised to resent the impeachment and declare the charge groundless and impudent, especially if he feels its injustice as applied to himself. To some Disciples this assertion concerning us will have the appearance of a false and malicious misrepresentation of facts; for of a large section of our people it is not true. In many localities where we are known it is conceded that we are most earnest in the effort to promote the unity of God's people by all possible means. Many of our leading preachers are conspicuous for their painstaking endeavors to advance the harmony of the church by establishing fraternal relations with all who love our Lord and are seeking to promote righteousness. Not a few of our brethren have been conspicuous in such united movements as Christian Endeavor, Young Men's Christian Association work, temperance agitation, the Bible Society, the Sunday school movement

in its broader phases, and other types of service which emphasize the essential unity of believers in Jesus. We are always proud to have our brethren honored in the great assemblies of Christian workers. In this pride there are mingled sentiments of satisfaction over the recognition we have received in this public way and of joy that we are able thus visibly to contribute to the practical unity of the church. One is glad to believe that this class of our people, who thus rejoice at all manifestations of fraternity, is large and is growing. To such the charge above named will seem false and uncharitable, for every effort of their lives is devoted to the spread of the spirit of harmony and love. Nor are such Disciples likely to be accused of any compromise upon the great principles which constitute our plea. They are the very ones who are known as ready always to give to every man that asks them a reason concerning the hope that is in them, yet with meekness and fear. In them the two elements of loyalty to the will of Christ and love to all who bear his name are fairly certain to have a balanced expression.

But one who is an observer of the facts can hardly deny that there is another section of our brotherhood, not separated, indeed, by any clear geographical line,

but yet existing more conspicuously in some sections of the country than others, whose attitude is quite different upon these questions. In the view of these brethren the whole Christian world outside our own ranks is hopelessly wrong, and can only by an extraordinary stretch of charity be called Christian at all. There is no perception of any change on the part of "the sects," as they are indiscriminately termed, toward us. They are alike unscriptural, unconvinced and hostile, as in the days of the fathers. To co-operate with such people is disloyalty and unfaithfulness to Christ. So these good brethren refuse all fellowship or recognition to such, and content themselves with charitable hopes, not unmingled with grave doubts, that in the abounding mercy of God these people may be saved, as brands snatched from the burning. Of course, it need hardly be added that to such brethren the saving of a soul from the bondage of Methodism or the darkness of Presbyterianism is as much a cause of rejoicing as the conversion of any other sinner from a godless life.

In such circles our people are likely to abstain from all effort in union movements. They think they cannot join in united evangelistic services lest they should seem to sanction "unscriptural methods." Thus they

lose their only opportunity to spread effectively the gospel at such times, and must content themselves with an "opposition meeting," or silence. This attitude gradually produces upon the community the impression of a clannish indifference or hostility to all united Christian effort, and presently we are passed over without notice in all plans for fraternal work among the churches. Thus the real tragedy of our cause in that locality is reached when we sink to the position of a narrow, suspicious sect, with all the exclusiveness and intolerance of the Plymouth Brethren or the "Auld Licht" Presbyterians of Scotland, and yet holding forth with the zeal of a party shibboleth the plea of Christian union!

But, it may be asked by one of these brethren, what would you have us do? Shall we surrender our convictions, retreat from our fortifications, abandon the teachings of the New Testament, and all for the sake of fellowship with those who refuse to follow the teachings of Jesus? The reply can be made in simple terms:

1. Loyalty to Christ and the teachings of the New Testament must be as strongly emphasized as ever. No man is called upon nor can be permitted to surrender his convictions regarding the Savior and the

Scriptures. It is the very principle of Protestantism and of Christianity that every man must be persuaded in his own mind, and must follow the teachings of the Lord as he understands them, using his best endeavors to come to their true meaning.

2. While he demands the right of private judgment for himself, he must concede it to others. He has no right to doubt that other Christians, who hold different views from his own, have either inherited them or absorbed them from their environment or reached them by earnest study. Believing these opinions to vary from the truth at certain points he may hope to be able, working in the spirit of love, to win them to what he believes the larger and truer view. But in no ordinary case has he the right to doubt their sincerity or impugn their loyalty to Christ. He may, on reflection, discover that their exhibition of the mind of the Master in their daily life more than outweighs his own correctness of view on Biblical teachings.

3. It is unnecessary that men should wait for agreement upon all points of Christian teaching before they co-operate in actual service for Christ. There are problems which lie at the door of every community in whose solution Christians of every communion should

find it a satisfaction to unite. The relation of a group of Disciples in a given town or city to a neighboring Baptist, Methodist or Congregational church must necessarily be closer than to any congregation of Disciples in another town or ward. Why not take up the task of unity right there in that local circle and promote its realization by such an attitude of love and fellowship as will persuade all that we are serious in our plea for the unity of God's people and believe in its practicability? The apparent disposition of the Disciples in many places is that of people who neither believe in the possibility of union nor care to exert themselves to secure its realization. Why not change all this by demonstrating, in the spirit of loyalty to Christ and of love to all who believe in him, the ease with which it may be promoted, if not actually realized?

4. The methods by which this may be brought about are, among others, these: Exchange of preachers in the regular services; union evangelistic services, in which the whole Gospel shall be proclaimed, but in a spirit of love which shall disarm all antagonism. Great interests obliterate small antipathies. A community aroused to a passion of earnestness over the salvation of men will not stop to debate subordinate

questions, especially where Holy Scripture is plain. Then union teachers' meetings, lectureships or classes for Bible study, and civic reforms of all kinds in which the church best shows her interest in the welfare of men. These are not mere ideals, but realities capable of actual accomplishment—indeed, going on under our very eyes. Some of our churches are promoting this very sort of Christian union to-day, with no loss of testimony as to the essentials of Gospel obedience. Why should not all our people be leaders in this work?

5. Christian unity will be realized by such methods of actual co-operation, and not by means of platforms, pacts and agreements formed by denominational representatives in solemn conference.

6. The task of the new century for the Disciples of Christ is to assist in the practical realization of Christian union. We have two ways open before us. One is that of a growing denomination, with all its machinery and its particular testimony. In that case we grow for a few years longer as we have done recently; then we lose the vital impulses of our youth and aggressiveness; we sink into a mere denomination like the rest, and the Christian world hurries past us to more important issues. We have had our reward, like the Pharisees. We have saved our life

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denominationally, but have lost it in reality. In future years the historian will write, "There was another denomination in that period, called," etc. On the other hand, we may choose to take up seriously the problem of Christian unity with which we started, and which, for purposes of increasing our own ranks, we appear to many to have abandoned. To the promotion of this enterprise we may commit ourselves with unreserved enthusiasm, being willing to give up anything which stands in the way of its realization. We may have to give up ourselves, our denominational standing, our machinery, and merge ourselves in the great united Church of Christ. We shall not have to give up a single principle for which we have contended, but only our divisive attitude. By this means we lose ourselves, but we save our plea, and thus ourselves, in the largest way.

CHAPTER IV.

DO WE WISH APOSTOLIC CHRISTIANITY RESTORED?

Since the day when Luther nailed his theses to the door of the castle-church at Wittenberg, the air has been full of the word "Reformation." The task which Wiclif, Hus and Savonarola had undertaken within the Church of Rome was seen to be impossible. The effort to remake the old was given up, or put beyond consideration when the very forces which might have wrought reform broke out of the old shell and started another movement. The Protestants, careless of mere formal continuity of ecclesiastical orders, harked back in spirit to the nobler days of the early church. This break with the historic organization which had usurped the functions of the body of Christ was so startling an event that all Europe was compelled to take sides. Soon the idea of Reformation was in the air. Too late the Church of Rome saw the necessity of clearing her skirts of charges which were everywhere being lodged

against her. Responding to this demand, she undertook the "counter Reformation," in which Loyola and his fellow Jesuits were the leaders. Meantime the great reformatory movement started by Luther was breaking up under the strongly-marked individualism of a period when for the first time the passion for religious freedom could be indulged, and when the authority of the church was denied. Every man was at liberty to proclaim his own convictions, and a growing spirit of separatism brooded over the deep. This was far better—evil as it was—than the old dead uniformity of Romanism; but it was a phase of things that could not abide. Yet it served to make conspicuous in the Christian vocabulary the word "Reformation." Every denomination which has started since the Lutheran revolt took its stand upon some neglected element of Christian teaching or life, and insisted upon "Reform."

It was the peculiarity of the fathers of this movement with which we are connected that they broke with this tradition at one point, and while they indeed spoke of their work as a reformation, the "current Reformation" and the like, they boldly advocated the "Restoration" of the apostolic church. Only by a return to the Church of Christ of the first century did

they consider it possible to reach the foundations of belief and secure the lost unity and vitality of the body of Christ. Therefore the slogans "Back to the Apostles," "Back to Christ" have been the watchwords of the Disciples from the first, and the restoration of apostolic Christianity their endeavor.

But precisely at this point arises one of those rejoinders from without, which it seems wise to consider with patience. The man who looks with an impartial eye upon our progress and hears our pronouncements of purpose is likely to say—as many are actually saying of us in these days: "The restoration of the conditions prevailing in the apostolic churches is both undesirable and impossible." No one, he would say, wishes to go back to the faulty and imperfect church life of the first century. The plane of Christian living in our time is much higher than that of the church membership in Corinth, Ephesus, Galatia and Rome. Moreover, the movement of the church is forward, not backward. The real cry of the church should be "Forward to Christ," not "Back to Christ," for our Leader is ever before us.

There is no word of this comment with which every intelligent Disciple does not agree. To desire to go back to the days when the church was first tak-

ing form, with materials gathered from Judaism and Paganism with all the prejudices and limitations of view, to say nothing of more degrading manifestations of the old life, still clinging to those who were quite sincere in their devotion to Christ, would be to wish a return from the strength and wisdom of manhood to the weakness and ignorance of the child. The church has been all too slowly disengaging herself from the enwrapping Judaism and Paganism of the past to wish to return to a day when they constituted the almost total environment of her life.

But the critic is in error in supposing that this is what the Disciples have proposed. There may have been those who, in the enthusiasm of their preaching, were not concerned to discriminate as to their exact meaning, and who therefore left their hearers in doubt as to the precise content of the words, "Restoration of Primitive Christianity," and the cry "Back to Christ." Certainly the fathers never meant to teach the desirability of restoring the actual conditions prevailing in the primitive churches. That would imply the supposition that the faulty type of Christian conduct observed in the churches to whom Paul wrote, and the limitations of Christian knowledge and activity in an age when the believing community was large-

ly unresourceful in the very elements which produce most effective Christian service, were desirable features for perpetuation. One's heart warms, indeed, as he finds in the pages of the New Testament conspicuous instances of earnestness, fidelity and heroism on the part, not only of individuals, but groups of Christians. But the churches in general filled the Apostles with grave disquietude, by reason of the ever-clinging tendencies of their former lives; and nothing but an optimism which recognized fully the saving grace of Christ could have heartened these great servants of God for their tasks.

It is not the church life of the primitive years to which the Disciples have sought to point the Christian world, but to the ideals of that church as contained in the teachings of the Master and his Apostles. Above the heads of the imperfect Christians of Corinth and Rome Paul saw the glowing vision of the ideal church—the glorious church of the future—actually realized, when the limitations and faults which he saw in the brethren of his own day should be left behind, and the assembly of the first-born whose names are written in Heaven, should appear as the representative of Christ in the world, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing—a church prepared, militant and

watchful, fair as the sun, clear as the moon, and terrible as an army with banners. It is this ideal church as outlined in the Christian records to which we direct our thought, with its teachings as to the great verities essential to human happiness and eternal well-being; its simple yet symbolic and impressive ordinances, few in number, yet eloquently speaking of those deepest mysteries of spiritual experience—birth into the likeness of the Lord, and nourishment by the impartation of his life—its sense of joy and freedom in employing all the forces of being in the rewarding and unrestrained service of the common Master, and its spirit of love which is the Spirit of Christ, whose presence proves likeness to him, and is the surest—nay, the only—test of Christian character.

The cry "Back to Christ" is therefore not a note of retreat. It is the command to go forward to the perfect attainment of the Christian ideal; an ideal, however, which was revealed for the first time in the historic experiences of the apostolic century. Yet that church of the first age, that ideal church, floats above the world to-day as truly as then. Indeed, it is nearer to us than it was to the early Christians, for it is the city of God, the New Jerusalem, coming down,

ever descending, becoming more capable of realization as the church grows in likeness to her Lord.

“The one far off, divine event
To which the whole creation moves,”

is nothing less than the blending of this heavenly ideal with the consummated human reality, because there is no longer a difference.

It is because the Disciples believe that this apostolic ideal is capable of realization, and that as the visible church adjusts itself to the invisible pattern its true functions may be more fully realized, its true power exercised and its universal fellowship of love enjoyed, that they spell out Apostolic Christianity in large letters, and seek to hasten the day when all shall build on the one divine foundation of Apostles and Prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone.

CHAPTER V.

WHAT DO WE MORE THAN OTHERS?

It is probable that a certain general consent may be secured among the Disciples to the statement that we are not seeking to restore the actual conditions prevailing among the New Testament churches, but rather to call attention to that apostolic ideal, which first took form in the teachings of Jesus. To the world of the first century that ideal was absolutely new, and indeed incapable of instant realization. It is plain that the church of the nineteenth century has not yet realized it, but that, on the whole, it has come much closer to its embodiment in actual practice than was seen in any previous period. Nevertheless, though the distance between apostolic teaching and Christian practice has lessened steadily during the centuries, there still remains much to be done in completing the identification of the actual with the ideal as set forth

in the teachings of the Lord, and reported unto us by them that heard him.

Every movement in the church has been an effort to restore some lost or neglected element of the faith. No body of Christian people has ever deliberately set itself to a departure from the teachings of the Gospel. But these departures have come in through the loss of vision, the failure of enthusiasm, the cooling of love. Hence the need of reformations, and the entire pathway of the church is marked by the memorials of such efforts, each effective in its own way, and to a great or less degree. When the present movement started, now known historically as the Christian Church, or the Disciples of Christ, its platform was so startling, and its ambition so great that it could not fail to attract attention. Its plea was the return, not to the reformation, nor to the church of the middle ages, nor even to the church fathers of the second and third centuries, but to the Christ and his first witnesses. With Professor Blackie, the pioneers of this effort, said: "We have no objection to a return to the apostolic fathers; but why stop with them when one can go back to the grandfathers, the apostles themselves?" They were content with nothing less than this. To restore the Christian ideals of the first days was their endeavor.

The apostolic teachings, the apostolic ordinances and the apostolic spirit became the objects of their contemplation, and the restoration of these to supremacy their hope. From these aims the Disciples have never departed; for them they still contend.

But once more we must consider what our friends have to say of this high enterprise, and must be content to learn wisdom at their lips, if indeed upon reflection they appear to be right. For they are saying, not a few of them, that if it be understood that we seek the restoration of the ideals of the apostolic church, and not the actual conditions of the first century, we can hardly claim to be more anxious to see this accomplished than are our religious neighbors. That they as sincerely seek to be obedient to Christ as do we, and that in following the leadings of the Spirit into the possession of the holy fruits of Christian character, it often appears that the advantage is with others, even some of the sects and denominations whom we denounce, rather than with us. That if an earnest effort to accomplish the will of our Lord be the test of a people, we have nothing whereof to boast above others; and that the commendation upon faithful effort to realize the true and essential things of Christian life rather than the small and inconsequen-

tial ends of a legal correctness, might rest upon some of those outside our circle rather than upon ourselves. In a word, that considering the greatness of our claim to return from the pools in the plain to their primal source in the flowing streams from Lebanon, the Master might well say to us, as to those of old, "What do ye more than others?" We have assumed a position which is like a city set upon a hill. Our claims are so great that if we do not give them a large measure of embodiment they appear to be only the bombastic and pretentious boastings of egotists.

Frankly let us say then that it is a source of satisfaction to us to find so much of the spirit of Christ abroad in his church. The old antagonisms and hatreds are disappearing. Much of the work to which the Disciples set themselves at the first has been accomplished.

1. The reverence for human creeds has well-nigh passed forever. Many hold them as historic testimonies which they believe to have served an excellent purpose, and which deserve to be kept as land-marks; but the church as a whole has little use for credal statements. It once took courage to denounce human formulations of this character. He who wastes

his time in the exercise today is needlessly insulting a dead antagonist.

2. The lordship of Jesus was a great watchword with the fathers. To call attention to his authority, rather than that of councils, synods and symbols was the effort of the primal days of this reformation. It was a word supremely needed in that time. Men were listening to Moses, Elijah, Ezra, Augustine, Luther, Calvin, Wesley, Williams and Robinson rather than to him. It was the task of the pioneers to ascend once more the mount of vision and still the strife of tongues among their religious contemporaries, while the voice from the cloud proclaimed, "This is my beloved Son; hear ye him." But in the years that have passed since that time this plea has become a commonplace of Christian teaching. The will of our Lord is studied with loving reverence by men of every communion in the effort to follow him in complete surrender. "Lord, what will thou have me to do?" is the passionate cry of thousands of every name. The world has never seen so marvelous an effort to translate the purposes of Jesus into human life as within a decade, and this by all the churches. It is idle to deny this. Nor will it do to say that because a man has not been immersed

all his earnest service goes for naught. Baptism is an act of loving obedience, which no one who understands its significance will decline to observe or desire to omit. But not all have had the same training, and, say what we will, not all who read the New Testament with apparent candor and willingness to be led into all the truth, understand their duty as it seems plain to us. Shall we therefore fail to discern in them, when it is present as often as it is, that deeper and truer test of Christian life, a Christlike character, and the Holy Spirit as an indwelling presence, giving victory over sin, and producing its appropriate fruit?

These two facts, the decay of loyalty to human creeds and the growth of a larger loyalty to Christ, as seen in a truer recognition of his authority, are witnessed in all the churches about us. That we have had a part in promoting these ends let us believe, with a certain reserve, and a great and deep shame that we have not done more. There was, perhaps, a certain priority in our efforts to attain these ends, but we alone have not brought even their present measure of expression to pass.

What then do we more than others? What have we that the rest have not, if the cry against creeds

is either become unnecessary or is shared by all; if the Lordship and authority of Jesus are lovingly recognized by all, and, in the deeper meaning of loyalty, by some perhaps more than by us; if Christian unity is regarded as desirable by all and is to some extent preached by all, as it was not thought of in the days of the fathers; if reverence for the Bible is growing in company with its more earnest study? Is our place already gone? Has our testimony become useless? Certainly not. Never more than now were the principles for which we stand needed. There remains yet much land to be possessed. Christian unity has not yet come to pass, nor can it, save upon the apostolic basis. But while we are thus giving to the world our testimony with no uncertain voice and thereby fixing in increasing measure the eyes of men upon us, we must see to it that we look out the best features of our brethren of other communions for contemplation and comment, not the worst; that we recognize the great strides that have been made in all the churches toward the ends we have sought; that we claim for this enterprise of ours only that modest credit which the facts warrant; and that, above all, we show ourselves an example to the believers in faith, in charity, in patience, in love and in purity.

CHAPTER VI.

WHAT CONSTITUTES A SECTARIAN ATTITUDE?

A body of people, gathered for a definite religious purpose and maintaining a consistent and growing organization through a given period, is not necessarily a sect, or even a denomination. It may be a band of earnest Christians laboring to promote a desirable end, and possessing all the elements of a complete and independent organism, and yet not be a sect. No one would claim that the Christian Endeavor movement is a sect. It is quite possible to see how other and similar societies, coming into being later on, imitating its methods and seeking to enter into competition with it through fear of its influence, might be sectarian and partisan in their nature; but Christian Endeavor is not such. The same thing may be said of the Young Men's Christian Association. It is a movement within the church for the accomplishment of a definite and needed ob-

ject. The Woman's Christian Temperance Union is of similar character. All these, and other agencies, are Christian, and therefore within the church as special manifestations of its life and purpose. It is of course possible that at times they may manifest, either locally or in the aggregate, partisan and narrow tendencies; but this will probably be exceptional.

It is, therefore, possible to see how the Disciples of Christ are not necessarily a sect or even a denomination merely because they have a special and somewhat separate form within the church. They have on hand an enterprise to which they wish to call the attention of the entire church, and which is as essential to the well-being of the body of Christ as the work of any such association as has been named above. An idea needs an organization to make it effective. Christianity needs the church to give it visible embodiment and power. A spirit without a body is a ghost. The Disciples need make no apology for their separate existence so long as their mission is unaccomplished.

The moment their plea for Christian unity becomes effective throughout the church and their efforts realize success, that moment their separate ex-

istence becomes no longer necessary, and if perpetuated beyond that time would be an obstruction to the progress of that unity, a useless and impertinent survival of a body whose ends were accomplished, and which ought to disappear. The persistence of the Disciples in a separate organization after the general acceptance of the principles for which they plead would be as meaningless and illogical as the survival of anti-slavery societies in our own time, or the perpetuation of anti-saloon leagues after the saloon shall have disappeared.

On the other hand, it is easy to see how a movement in the church can have the appearance and produce the impression of being a denomination and a sect. Such is always the case when it enters the field as a rival to the other Christian forces in a community, thrives at their expense, antagonizes them wherever possible, and settles down to secure a permanent and assured foothold as a church with a platform to which it demands submission, excluding from its fellowship and consideration all who refuse such adherence. Now the Disciples of Christ may occupy either one of these positions; in fact, in some localities the one impression is made, and in some the other. It is to be feared that the second

attitude is more common than the first. It is certain that our growth has brought us to the point where we must deliberately choose between the two types of influence. There was a time when our work was obscure; today it is no longer done in a corner. We are like a city set on a hill. We are soon to be known and read of all men. These are moments of crisis, and it is no less important because many of our people are apparently indifferent to it. That very attitude of indifference has in its effects all the importance of a deliberate choice, and the result is a quiet and steady drifting in the direction of the narrow and sectarian position.

An example or two may suggest themselves as likely to occur, or perhaps as actually occurring. In a city of 5,000 inhabitants, with twelve churches, representing the various denominations, and providing in a fairly competent manner for the religious life of the community, the Disciples have no congregation. In spite of the fact that there are many cities of much greater size in the same state, in which large portions of the population are unreached by Christian influences of any sort, this amply provided and somewhat over-churched town is invaded—a church is established, proselytes are eagerly sought

from the churches already at work there, and a spirit of antagonism, the very opposite of that of Christian unity, is generated. What is the impression made upon that community by such procedure? Instead of seeking a neglected field, of which there are plenty, where ignorance of the Gospel vies with infidelity, and atheism in darkening the souls of men, every principle of economical administration and Christian courtesy is violated by intrusion upon a field already occupied by forces which only a persistent bigotry would deny to be Christian. Let us agree that the Gospel is not preached there as we believe it should be preached; nevertheless, since the field is occupied, and the Gospel preached—even in an imperfect manner—would it not be better to seek the really needy places? And would not our plea of Christian unity be taken more seriously if we were more wise and appreciative of the good others are seeking to do?

If it be suggested that in such a city there might be already a considerable number of Disciples not yet organized into a congregation, whom the above suggestion would deprive of a church home, the answer would at once commend itself to all that this very fact would prove that the town was not “amply provided”

with church facilities, and the conditions would therefore be of a different sort. Where, however, the number of such believers is small, one of two courses must present itself. The first will be that of uniting with that body of Christians which most nearly complies with the teachings of the Scripture as understood by such seekers after a church home. The duty and privilege of Christian fellowship cannot be over-estimated. To be deprived of such a home is a misfortune few Christians will suffer unless the reasons are imperative. Moreover the privilege of free testimony to the teachings of the Bible is always enjoyed, no matter what the church may be. To those who would decline to associate themselves with any congregation not of our own order, when this offers the only means of Christian fellowship, the reminder needs to be brought that this was the very opportunity, and the only opportunity, the fathers sought. They were members of churches with whose attitude they did not agree, yet they wished not to leave but only to bear witness. We know of instances in which a whole congregation has been leavened by the union spirit through the efforts of one of our brethren who found it the only available church home. The second course open to one in the position named is that which re-

mains when his conscience forbids him to enter the fellowship of any congregation not holding the truth as proclaimed by us. Such an attitude, held in obedience to conviction, should be respected, even if one believed the view a mistaken one. The clear duty, however, of such a Disciple would be to abide in separate loyalty to his views till such time as modifications in existing organizations made it possible for him to unite conscientiously with a church already active, or the growing number of his brethren, through arrivals or through his own efforts, made advisable the formation of a group of Disciples into a congregation.

Another case may be instanced. On the missionary map of the world certain assignments of territory have been made for many years by representatives of all Christian forces, in the interests of economy and good fellowship. No one religious body can do justice to the needs of the entire world, and so this agreement has been reached, which, though not a hard and fast law, is recognized and generally observed. The vast stretches of unevangelized territory leave plenty of room for any newcomers in the field. Now suppose that in a region long occupied by one of the great Christian communions, whose work has been marked by great earnestness and success, there

should come a company of men representing the Disciples. They ignore entirely the compact which has guided the Christian forces hitherto. They disregard all rules of comity and courtesy. They deem it as much their duty to convert the members of the rival Christian organization to their view as to save the heathen, and actually spend the most of their time in this work. They refuse all fraternal recognition to members of the earlier Christian body, whose legitimate bounds they have invaded, and upon advices from like-minded people in America they censure those of their own number who venture upon any association with such. And all this with the plea of apostolic Christianity and Christian union on their lips! What can be the estimate of us formed by our Christian neighbors who observe such conduct on our part? Could there be any more striking illustration of the sect spirit, which is the spirit of anti-Christ? Nor are these mere fancy sketches. Many know them to be true to facts. Fortunately they represent only individual narrowness, and not the policy of any of our missionary boards, to which such conduct on the part of any of their representatives can only bring shame and grief of heart. The only honorable thing in such cases is to prove our Chris-

tian spirit and real desire for the unity of God's people by withdrawing from such unrighteously invaded fields as soon as possible.

Paul, when imprisoned at Rome, learned of certain men who were preaching Christ out of strife and envy, thinking to bring upon him affliction in his bonds. And though he knew their gospel to be incomplete and fragmentary, he exclaimed, with a noble faith in the saving power of Christ, however presented, "What, then, does it matter? Only this, that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is preached; and therein I rejoice, yea, and will rejoice." More of the Apostle's fine tolerance is needed by us in our estimate of the work of our Christian neighbors, whose zeal for Christ we cannot question, and whose Christian spirit might well put some of us to shame. Well may we take thought for the banishment from our work of these tokens of the sectarian attitude which vitiate, wherever they are manifested, not only our plea for union, but even our claim to be Christians.

CHAPTER VII.

A HISTORIC INSTANCE.

The question is likely to be asked, How can a people so band themselves together as to give effective witness to a needed principle of Christian teaching without at the same time incurring the danger of becoming a denomination or a sect? If it is true that a neglected element of our holy faith can only be brought to the attention of the church universal by a body of people standing for its advocacy, how is that body to be saved from the disaster of degenerating into a mere party, with the selfish aims and efforts of a separate and rival body of Christians? Speaking of the particular problem before us as a people, there are not a few Disciples who frankly accept the position of a distinct denomination, and glory in the fact. They affirm that we are able to "take the field," by which they seem to mean that with our aggressiveness and clear-cut pronouncement upon the elements

of the Gospel, we can rapidly reach the front rank among the denominations, and perhaps absorb or drive out of the field some of our religious neighbors. There seems to be little disposition to believe that the other religious bodies will come to us. There was a time when this was confidently affirmed. But the most sanguine of our brethren are becoming convinced that we can hardly expect the Christian world, when it comes to the point of abandoning denominationalism, as it surely will, to join a people possessing so many of the denominational marks as do we. Before that day arrives we, too, shall face the necessity of giving up our separatism; and the greatest danger appears to be that we shall manifest as great reluctance as the rest.

But is it possible to find an example in point, an instance of a people united in the effort to bring the entire church to its duty upon a great but neglected truth of the faith, who at the same time sought no mere denominational place, and when their task was accomplished, were content to disappear? It is certain that several instances of the sort could be cited. One must suffice.

In the early part of the eighteenth century, when religious life had notably declined in Europe, and men

were wondering if the church had not lost forever its power; when the sermons in English churches were no more charged with Christian fervor than as though they were pagan orations; when continental Europe was listening to the soothing tones of smooth and easy moralists, the offspring of the school of Voltaire, and before the Wesleys and Whitefield had risen to speak in trumpet tones to a slumbering church, there grew up in a small district in Saxony a people with a living faith and a vital testimony. They were a remnant of the followers of John Hus, and had been expelled from Bohemia and Moravia in 1627. They settled in Herrnhut in 1722. Led by Count Zinzendorf, a noble who was willing and zealous to devote himself and his possessions to the service of Christ, they began in a quiet manner by seeking to realize for themselves a deeper religious life. They wished to speak with God, that they might be fitted to speak for him. Their eagerness and consecration soon attracted kindred spirits from far and near, though they were modest to a degree in sounding a trumpet. John Wesley, then a young man, went over from England and lived with them for a time, and his later life showed constant marks of the association. But the Moravians were not intent upon

forming a church. They were convinced that the two things the Christian world needed were larger spiritual life and a deep concern for foreign missions, and they believed that the two purposes were so related that the one could not be separated from the other. Wherever men had the spirit of Christ, they affirmed, foreign missions would engage their attention. Wherever missions were zealously prosecuted, there spiritual life was the result both in the home and foreign field. They therefore threw themselves with unreserved enthusiasm into the propaganda. They went in large numbers to the ends of the earth to proclaim the Gospel. They poured out their scanty means in astonishing measure for the missionary cause. They built ships and sent them laden with preachers and Bibles into far lands. Their one cry was, "The Gospel for all nations." They were few in numbers, but mighty in faith. They knew what it was even to be persecuted for righteousness' sake. Yet in much proof of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded into the riches of their liberality, for, according to their power, yea and beyond their power, they gave of their own accord. This was easy to explain, for first they gave their own selves unto the Lord. Such conduct could

not fail to attract the notice of the entire church. The needs of the foreign field began to call loudly to all. Then came the wonderful missionary revival, headed by Carey, Moffett, Judson, and the rest of those pioneers whose names are written in heaven. Meantime the Moravians grew and spread through the world. But everywhere they had a single testimony, "The Gospel for all nations." They grew apparently only that they might have voice to speak and hand to labor. When the church began to awaken to its great responsibility, and all the communions were full of tongues that spoke loudly of the common need, the Moravians began to diminish in numbers. Their task was no longer special. The Church of Christ had listened to the call, and was arising in its strength. Much land yet remained to be possessed, but the churches could be trusted to conquer it in the name of the Lord. The spirit of missions, which at the first, but for them, would have been only a sentiment, was now finding embodiment on all sides. For this much of the credit was due the Moravians, but they never demanded it. It was enough to see the work advancing. There was no reason why a particular body should be kept up to carry forward the task which all now were willing to share. Like Simeon

of old, they received with joy the sign of the new day and cried, "Now, Lord, lettest thou thy servant depart in peace according to thy word, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation." The Moravians today are a disappearing brotherhood. Now and then one comes upon a congregation, perpetuated rather by denominational pride than to accomplish a great task. Wherever they are found they are still earnest advocates of foreign missions. But their testimony has lost its special force, their work is ended, and the noblest spirits of that historic movement could not ask a more fitting consummation to their task than that the body of their brethren and followers should be absorbed into the great Church of Christ, which has now caught the motto from their lips and is proclaiming with the zeal of those stout and lonely champions of missions, "The Gospel for all nations."

Is not this an instance in point? The Disciples of Christ have a testimony as vital to the final welfare of the church as had the Moravians. At the first they were the lonely and devoted champions of the cause of Christian unity. Now the Christian world is taking up the cry, "That they all may be one." It is not ours to claim the credit for this alone. God knows the truth and will reward us as we merit. Nor is the

cause of unity yet sufficiently advanced to permit us to give up our task. It may take much longer time than we have yet regarded necessary to accomplish this purpose. Many are yet to be convinced that sectarianism is inexpedient and sinful. Many more are unprepared as yet to admit that Christian unity is practicable. The method of its accomplishment seems obscure. It must be our work to enforce this plea, to prove its desirability, and most of all to illustrate its method. This our entire history has prepared us to do. We have come to the Kingdom for such a time as this. The first step is the cultivation of the spirit of fellowship. A common aim must precede a common organization. Unity comes before union. The matter of final and incorporating coalescence can only develop from a consciousness that there is no longer divergence of belief or practice which would prevent complete fellowship. We need not concern ourselves with the problem of the form church union will ultimately take. The spirit of love and loyalty will form for itself a body suited to its needs. Our task is more immediate and definite. It is to make practical all elements of unity which lie within reach at this moment. But the outcome we cannot doubt. The Savior's prayer will yet be an-

swered, the apostolic dream will yet be realized, and if the separateness which has been thrust upon us needs to be given up to aid in this result, we can not hesitate. The sacrifice we ask of others we must be prepared to make ourselves. If all denominational separatism is to be abandoned, may not even that organization which we have acquired thus far in the prosecution of the work of Christ need to be laid aside in order that the very purpose of our movement may be achieved? The united church will not be our church, but the church of Christ, including all who follow him, drawn into united service by the need of oneness, which we have constantly proclaimed. We shall not lose, but rather find ourselves by thus abandoning what seems our corporate life. The only way in which life can be saved in the Kingdom of God is by giving it freely for the highest ends. When we lose ourselves for the sake of uniting all, we save ourselves in the supreme sense. This time may still be distant, but the disposition will fix the curve of our movement. We have the same love of our history and brotherhood that we see in others for their own. To give up this separate existence for the sake even of our self-realization when visible union becomes possible, may be as difficult for us as for them.

But when that time comes, and the forces of righteousness are moving toward each other with friendly air and desire for union, upon that foundation which alone is capable of sustaining such a universal fellowship of believers, may we be great and unselfish, wise and discerning enough to say, like Simeon of old, like the Moravians of later days, "Now, Lord, lettest thou thy servant depart in peace; for mine eyes have seen thy salvation."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE TWO PATHS.

There are three periods in the history of any movement that comes to prominence as the promoter of an idea. There is first the period of its inception and early growth, when it first takes form as a statement of truth, and makes its appeal for support. It may have no vitality, and therefore attract no advocates beyond a limited circle. In that case its first period is its last. But if it lives and begins to find friends, it grows with more or less rapidity, gathering strength as it advances till a considerable body of representatives stands ready to defend and propagate it. During this period the influence of the original idea is strong, and those who enter the circle are likely to be attracted by the dominant principle. The mere matter of forming an organization is secondary. Nobody thinks as far as that. A few people have seized upon a truth which they are sure the rest should recognize, and they

propose to press it to acceptance. The fact of separate existence is neither invited nor expected. There is the hope that all men will presently accept with grateful hearts the new truth presented.

But time goes on, and the world has not accepted the teaching. Yet its advocates have become more numerous, and presently the thought of a certain separateness and strength of organization grows up. Then comes most naturally the passion for growth. The development of the organism is the prevailing concern. This is accomplished by the uplifting of the watchwords with which the movement started, but in the conduct of the most active and zealous representatives there may be detected a growing zeal for the organization as such, and a lessening of emphasis upon the first purposes of the enterprise. This does not mean that the familiar rallying cries will be omitted. That would be impossible if success is to be achieved. But nevertheless there is apparent to the careful observer a loss of the early ideals in the passion for numbers and power. In this period may be seen examples of remarkable activity on the part of men whose whole purpose is that of building up the organization, who at the same time have apparently lost wholly, or never possessed, the dominant thought of the movement, but

have only a clan or party loyalty, and repeat the watchwords with a meaning only intelligible from their narrow and partisan point of view. There will indeed be many men of sincere and noble purpose who keep fresh in their hearts the ideals of the first days, but it is the danger of this second period that the organization will forget all but its strife for success, and in its effort to save itself, it will lose its better life.

Then comes the third and last period. The beginning of that era is a moment of critical importance. Two paths are open; two possibilities offer themselves. Between these there must be a choice. Even where the crisis is not perceived and the two ways not noticed, the choice is always deliberately made. It is possible, first, to take inventory of the progress made thus far, to ask what were the original purposes of the body, and how far it has accomplished them. When it is seen that there has been great growth in numbers, but that the original ideals have been somewhat dimmed and forgotten, or obscured by the very formularies which were intended to interpret them, there is still, perhaps, time to save the movement, and it is the instant duty of its adherents to return to a new devotion to those ideals, and to set the now full-grown power of the organization to their accomplishment. It is the nick of

time. It is the moment of destiny. It is the tide in the affairs of men which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune. By thus reverting to the true purposes of the movement its real ends may be accomplished. Even the mechanical zeal of the middle period may prove no hindrance if it be the precursor of a supreme effort in the direction of the primitive purpose. In that path lies true success.

But the second path is open and broad, and many there be that go in thereat. It is a road, entering upon which the feeling of satisfaction takes possession of the host thus formed. It is increased in goods. It has achieved a party success, but it has lost the vision that gave it birth. The result can be easily foreseen. Its power is gone. Like the church in Sardis it has a name that it lives, but is dead. Like the church in Laodicea it says, "I am rich and have gotten riches, and have need of nothing," but it knows not that it is wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked. Like the church in Ephesus, it has left its first love, and needs to remember from whence it is fallen, and repent and do the first works. Otherwise the end is near. A certain career of narrowing usefulness will follow by very force of the momentum achieved. Then lessening progress, growing indifference, increasing dis-

integration, failure, death. The candlestick has been removed.

Now in the things which we are saying, the chief point is this: The Disciples of Christ began their work with a clear and lofty ideal, the unity of all God's people upon the apostolic foundation. For this principle there was a deep and holy enthusiasm at the first, and but little thought that its realization was a matter of long delay. The fathers saw that sectarianism was the chief obstacle to the success of Christianity, and they believed it possible to reach a unity of the people of God which should vindicate our holy faith in the eyes of the world. Into this enterprise they threw themselves with unrestrained enthusiasm. They cared little for organization, but they sought everywhere a hearing. They were not so much a body of people as a voice. Like that other voice in the wilderness of Judea, they wished nothing for themselves, but everything for the principle of which they were the heralds. That was the first period of our work.

Then came the delay. The Christian world did not take up the cause of unity with any enthusiasm. It was either indifferent or hostile. It was apparent that a campaign was needed. Only numbers could give effectiveness to a campaign. Hence

came the zeal for numbers, influence, machinery. All these came gradually. But the danger incurred in the growth of such a movement, especially in its transition from the first to the second periods, was present. We have now become such a people as the fathers never dreamed of. We have grown by insistence upon Christian unity upon the apostolic foundation. Yet to this plea we have added a tremendous enthusiasm and an aggressiveness which would have wrought wonders even with a less vital plea. In fact, it is perfectly apparent that there are many men in our ranks preaching Christian unity upon the apostolic foundation who comprehend neither Christian unity nor apostolic Christianity. The watchwords may be the same as those the fathers used, but there is constant danger of losing the germ of truth while holding tenaciously to its shell.

We stand therefore at the opening of the third period of our history. Before us open two paths. The one is the way of true success. It can only be entered by taking earnest heed to the things which we have heard from the fathers lest we drift away from them. We have the organization and strength to make Christian unity effective if we will. This is not to be done by means of platforms and conferences. These only

emphasize the obstacles. It can only be done by actual attempts to unify the Christian spirit and activity of the places where we have churches. If our churches in all towns and cities where they are found would begin at once the cultivation of Christian fellowship with all other churches; promoting such united efforts as should bear witness to the reality of our plea, we might become a power where now we are only a sect. No compromise of the truth would be necessary. All that is needed is the recognition of such elements of Christlikeness as appear in our religious neighbors, and they are many. United evangelistic meetings may be held, in which, instead of being left out, and then rejoicing that "the union meeting of the sects met with but slight success in this place" (!) we should be the leaders; exchanges of pastors can be arranged with neighboring churches; when the pastor of one of our churches is absent, what could be more Christian and inspiring than to invite a sister congregation to worship with us and have its pastor preach? By such and many other methods our plea for Christian union would be taken seriously in many communities where now it is unknown or regarded merely as a sectarian shibboleth; and moreover there would come far more

favorable opportunities to proclaim in a spirit of love what we hold to be apostolic Christianity.

The other path is broader, smoother, plainer, and many of our people are already beginning to enter it. It is to go on building up a sectarian organization, emphasizing numbers, increasing machinery and using the old familiar watchwords, but with neither the desire nor the expectation of making them succeed. For a few years more we shall be strong, shall perhaps increase in strength. But soon the end will come in declining numbers because the motive is lost. The fate of the other denominations will be upon us. It will be found out that our devotion to Christian unity was but a name; our definition of apostolic Christianity narrow and partisan.

We have yet the choice before us. We stand at the parting of the ways. The next ten or fifteen years will largely decide which path we shall enter: the path of true success by earnest and self-forgetting advocacy of the principles for which we historically stand, or that of self-seeking devotion to numbers, but with a loss of vision, a lessening of enthusiasm, and the swift death that waits upon decay.

CHAPTER IX.

DENOMINATIONAL SENTIMENT.

One who has been reared among the Disciples of Christ, or has companied with them long enough to catch the watchwords and phrases current in this reformation, will have learned to identify certain types of thought and sentiment as characteristic of the movement. Wherever these phrases are heard one who belongs to this company of believers feels at home. The very dialect of the Disciples has peculiarities which may be recognized in all quarters. How often is one of our people heard to say that it would be impossible for a Disciple to be a member of any other church; that we have the truth, and if the denominational world would only open its eyes and read the Bible, nothing could prevent all who stand elsewhere from coming with us; that our preachers are the best in the world; that our churches are the most cordial and homelike; that one never can feel the same in any

other atmosphere ; that we know the Bible as no others know it, and that we are becoming a great people, soon to take the earth. These are phrases taken at random from that extensive list familiar to us all, and they have a deep and abiding meaning as we repeat them to each other. It is difficult for us to believe that any other body of people can have the same close fellowship, the same deep conviction of truth, the same love for the Scriptures, the same confidence in their right understanding of the Word of God, the same aggressive and direct appeal to the world that we have.

And yet perhaps one of the qualities which we need to add to these admirable features of belief is a wider acquaintance with the actual sentiments prevailing among our Christian neighbors with reference to the denominations with which they are identified. If one were to go into a Baptist family, where the traditions of denominational life were well preserved, he would find the same pride, the same tenacity of purpose, the same confidence of having the correct religious position and the same wonder that any should fail to see things from that point of view. In Presbyterian ranks it is even more truly the case, by reason of the fact that Presbyterianism has a history runnin,

far back into English and Scotch life. Added to his apparent certainty as to his theological position, the Presbyterian has a pride in the historic influence of the church with which he is connected, which traces to the inspiration of Presbyterianism most of those great achievements in the domain of liberty, both on this continent and in Great Britain, of which the Anglo-Saxon race is proud.

With the Episcopalian the sentiment is the same, though slightly differing in its ground. He has no doubt as to the correctness of his church position and its harmony with the Scriptures. He has heard it defended, since his earliest years, by men skilled in apologetics, and he is convinced that, added to the fact of harmony with biblical teaching, the church has the finest order of services and the most direct connection with the apostolic church of any body of believers. In the Methodist Episcopal Church one meets the same type of belief. The Methodist is confident that he knows the Bible, for one of the tasks emphasized by John Wesley was the study of the Word of God by his people, and to this the Methodist adds his admiration for the magnificent machine which Methodism has produced in the world, and his belief that no other body of people makes so much of vital religion as his own.

In the story, "O'er Moor and Fen," by Silas Hocking, there is an admirable illustration of this sentiment. The speaker is an elder in the Methodist Church in England, and is referring to that superiority of Methodists over all others, which is the settled conviction of himself and of his people. He naively says, "Of course I need not enlarge on the fact that Methodist preachers are far ahead of any others. That goes without saying. I am anything but a narrow man, and will admit that there may be good preachers among the Independents and Baptists, or even in the Established Church, although they would all be wise if they gave up their fads and came over in a body to our denomination. But as for comparing the preachers of these sects with our preachers, well, it would be like comparing skim milk with good cream. Why, the other day I went to hear the Bishop of the Diocese, and I could not help feeling sorry for the congregation. Such poor, watery stuff you never heard. As I said to one of our local preachers, what a pity it was we couldn't get the Bishop to one of our local preachers' homiletical classes, it would have done him a world of good. But there, the man was more to be pitied than blamed." Probably every body of people holds similar views regarding its own superiority, from the

Roman Catholic to the Quaker. Sometimes the sentiment finds humorous illustration in the sort of preaching which one finds in small and remote districts, and the dogmatism of the holding forth is usually in proportion to the obscurity of the sect and the unsequential nature of its tenets. An unusual degree of charity for others, and of hope for their salvation, was therefore exhibited by the mountain preacher in Kentucky who exclaimed, "The Lord air powerful good, an' if he neow and then lets in a sinner as has plumb repented, even if he don't come up to this yere standard, I hain't a-goin' ter object. There may be some in other churches as don't know no better, and the Lord may, now an' then, take pity on some on 'em. But, brethering, mine's the reg'lar way."

Reflection upon these facts will bring to the Disciples of Christ the conviction that two things are necessary to the successful propagation of their plea for Christian unity upon the foundation of apostolic Christianity. The first of these is the cheerful and cordial recognition of the fact that our denominational brethren believe themselves to be right in their Scriptural positions, and are convinced, each one of them, that his church is superior to all others in the par-

ticular point which he believes of the most vital moment to Christianity; and the second is of equal importance, viz., wisdom to see that to most of them our claim to superiority seems like arrogance and intolerance, especially to those who have been reared in these different denominational atmospheres. Nothing but the full recognition of all the truth possessed and all the Christian spirit manifested by our religious neighbors can give us the slightest ground of approach to them in the plea which we make. That we have a plea which must be presented to them, and whose acceptance is essential to the welfare of the church is a certainty. How shall we most effectively present it? We may assume a polemic attitude, charge upon their ranks and steal some of their members now and then; but we shall never be able to make a really successful attempt to bring Christian unity to pass, until we see that others as well as ourselves have strong convictions and perfect confidence in their position, and will only yield what seem to us minor and unimportant contentions when they are persuaded that the welfare of the cause of Christ demands emphasis both at home and in the foreign field upon that "unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace," for which our Master prayed, and which is the hope of the choicest spirits in the church today.

CHAPTER X.

APOSTOLIC CHRISTIANITY—THE SOURCES.

A people professing to be the exponents of the apostolic church should be clear in their own minds as to what that term really signifies. It may be well, therefore, to consider the matter from four points of view, the sources, the doctrine, the ordinances and the spirit of apostolic Christianity. And first as to the sources.

The New Testament presents approaches to the life of Christ from various points of view, and this variety is one of the chief elements in the completeness of its presentation of our Lord's work. One who would gain a comprehensive view of the apostolic Christianity of the first century, as interpreted by the followers of Jesus, must give careful attention to the different groups of writings which the New Testament contains. These groups, in general, may be viewed in the following manner :

1. The Gospels contain the portrait of Jesus given as completely as was possible in so brief a space. They do not purport to give the life of Christ, but only such portions of it as directly concern the preaching of the Gospel in the most effective manner. They reveal his spirit in dealing with men, his views of God, of righteousness, of sin, of judgment, of eternal life. This teaching for the most part is found under the general category of the Kingdom of God, which was Jesus' way of referring to the new social order which he was inaugurating. The Gospels deal with the prophetic expectations of the Messianic work, with the teaching of Jesus, his miracles and his programme, and gradually they rise from the largely national interests, which concern the Gospel of Matthew, up through the varying grades of Roman and Greek thought to the universal point of view, where all national distinctions are lost and the highest spiritual atmosphere is gained in the Gospel of John. It is not surprising, therefore, that these four books, with which the Epistles of John are so closely related in spirit, deal but little with what might be called the organized forms of Christian activity, but rather with the spiritual purposes of our Lord in giving expression to the life of God which he revealed.

2. The Acts is in one sense the continuation of the narrative of early Christianity, as it found formal expression in the activities of the Christian community after the day of Pentecost. The church now became the visible embodiment and representative of the Kingdom insofar as the Kingdom could be expressed in an actual organization. The society of believers grew, and this growth demanded a certain unity of action and co-operation. The Book of Acts is the picture of the church at work under the direction of the apostles, guided by the Holy Spirit. The whole atmosphere of the book is that of movement, of energy, of activity. It is therefore practical, and its teachings grow out of the witnessing of the apostles to the life and character of Jesus, and take the form of a history of their work. The book shows how the early Christians did, therefore how Christians of all ages are to do. Its purpose was both to illustrate the outgoing energies of the new organism as embodying the facts of the great commission in actual service, and also to show how men were brought to Christ in the apostolic years; and all this under the constant oversight of the Holy Spirit.

3. The Epistles of Paul approach the character of Christ from still another point of view. They make

but slight reference to his actual life, which is the theme of the Gospels, nor do they lay special stress upon the activities of the church, though they refer frequently both to the Apostle's work and to that of his spiritual children in the various communities where he had preached. But the general impression of the Pauline writings is that of Christian truth presented not so much in the form of systematic treatise as of personal instructions to believers regarding their duty to Christ and to each other. They are not theological in the sense of being ordered discourses upon the elements of Christian faith; but they are none the less theological as embodying the teachings of a master in the faith, who felt that if one's point of view was right he could be trusted to work out the problem of his Christian life. The four groups of Pauline Epistles have each its own special theme. That of the first, the Thessalonian group, is the coming of the Lord, and in general the doctrine of last things. The second group emphasizes the great truths of our holy faith as set forth in the epistles to the Galatians, Corinthians and Romans, and where these epistles are most practical they still hark back to the doctrinal teachings which form their principal theme. Those of the third

group, including Philippians, Colossians, Philemon and Ephesians, deal with the Christian in his relations to Christ and to his fellow-believers in the intimacy of the domestic, social and church life, and their chief end is the exaltation of the character of our Lord as over against all the misleading tendencies of the time. The fourth group, including I Timothy, Titus and II Timothy, may be called pastoral, as giving special thought to the welfare of the churches in their organization and activity. In this group we approach nearest to the atmosphere of the Acts.

4. The Epistle to the Hebrews presents Christ from a still different point of view; addressing itself, as it does, to that class of Jews who were troubled by what seemed the poverty of the new faith in the elements of gorgeous and time-honored ritual which had characterized Judaism. It seeks to show that Christianity is still better furnished in these regards than even Judaism; that it has a mediator greater than prophets, angels, Moses or Joshua; a high priest greater than Aaron; a sanctuary more glorious than the temple; a covenant founded upon better promises and more enduring than that given to the fathers, and that its most glorious factor is Christian faith

which lays hold upon the unseen rather than upon the spectacular ministries of the temple, which are temporal, about to vanish away. This is the first great apologetic, and its emphasis is laid upon the analogies offered by Judaism to the chief elements of Christian belief.

These are not the only types of teaching found, but they are the chief. There are of course the Apocalypse or Revelation of John, and certain other varieties introduced in James, Peter and Jude. But these four stand out prominently as the leading representatives of New Testament thought. It is easy to see that if one were to confine his attention to either one of these four groups he would have only a partial view of the Gospel and its work. The man who studies exclusively the Gospels and the writings of John will have what may be called an ethical, mystical, or almost totally spiritual conception of the character of Christianity as an idea in the world, mediated by Jesus, but not taking its place so much as an organism as a spirit or purpose in human hearts. Nearly all the partial views of Christianity which have tended to mysticism have drawn exclusively upon the material of the Gospels and the writ-

ings of John, without balancing that conception by other necessary features of the New Testament.

Again, one who confines his attention largely to the Book of Acts is likely to interpret Christianity as being chiefly concerned with an organization. The activities of Christian life, its plans of work, its propagation, its extension in all the world, these are the chief features of the book, and one might, by undue emphasis upon this, to the exclusion of other portions of the New Testament, form an idea that Christianity consisted in the building up of a church, or a body of churches scattered throughout the world, without perceiving the real character which the churches ought to manifest or the spiritual power of the Christ within them.

Again, if one were to confine himself largely to the writings of the Apostle Paul his view of Christianity would become the doctrinal view. He would conceive of our holy faith as consisting in certain propositions to be accepted, and would feel that when this creed was perfected his duty was performed. This is precisely what has frequently transpired.

Lastly, if the Epistle to the Hebrews is the favorite portion of the New Testament, there is the danger that the view taken will be that Christianity is sim-

ply a larger Judaism, and that all the elements of the Old Testament faith are necessary approaches to a true understanding of the Gospel. Such a person will spend much time in investigating the character and structure of the tabernacle worship, the Aaronic priesthood, and the various symbols which the writer of the epistle summoned to do service as aids in interpreting the work of Christ. Thus that which was intended to be simply a help to Jewish Christians becomes the standard of interpretation for the church.

The remedy for all these partial views of the Gospel is to be found in a careful adjustment of each to the rest. When more closely studied they ought, each one of them, to yield the universal elements of the faith so that no such mistakes would be made; but such has not been the case. The mystic and ethical culturist have insisted upon the use of the Gospels to the neglect of the rest. The exaggerated emphasis upon mere organization and activity has come from the undue estimate of the Book of Acts and the neglect of the other books. Doctrinal and credal enthusiasm has arisen from undue devotion to the writings of Paul, and forgetfulness of other necessary New Testament documents, while the Book of Hebrews has led many a biblical student into fantastic

exegesis as remote from practical value as are most of the discussions of the Apocalypse.

The Disciples of Christ must keep constantly in mind this lesson. It was especially our task to call the attention of the world to the Book of Acts as a neglected portion of the Holy Scripture. Our preaching has always been fashioned by a careful study of that book, and since it is the record of apostolic activity and preaching there is always the danger that we shall forget those necessary features of our faith which are not so much emphasized in this book, but are rather taken for granted. The apostles preached faith, repentance and baptism in plain terms, to be understood by all; but we must also remember that our Lord spoke of being born again in terms mystical and spiritual, and yet as valuable as the simpler statements of the apostles. If we can successfully avoid the danger of making Christianity simply a scheme of organization, and can adjust our interpretation of the Book of Acts with the Gospels on the one side and the great teachings of the Apostle Paul on the other, so that no element of Christianity is neglected, but shall see that the mystical, the spiritual, the doctrinal, the symbolic and the practical have a like value, we shall gain a fresh enthusiasm in our preaching of apostolic Christianity.

CHAPTER XI.

APOSTOLIC CHRISTIANITY—THE DOCTRINE.

It has been the contention of the Disciples of Christ that the teaching of the apostolic Church was not an elaborate formulation to be expressed in articles, in creeds or confessions of faith, but the simple statement of the divine character, the Messianic dignity and the Lordship of Jesus. To discriminate between the elaborate pronouncements of Christian teaching demanding allegiance to credal statements, only partially intelligible to the majority of Christian people, and the simple platform of the New Testament, was a task of supreme interest in the days when this reformation began, and when much was made of doctrinal orthodoxy. To call the attention of the world away from the elaborate tests of fellowship which had been set up by various bodies of Christians, and to invite the thought of the world to the character of Jesus was a task of supreme moment and measureless results. It has been proven that this service

was in the interest of Christian truth and a larger view of Christ. The creed basis has lost strength from year to year, and most of these formulations of earlier days have today only the value of landmarks in ecclesiastical history, interesting but not authoritative. The Westminster Confession, the most ambitious of all, has long since lost its true significance as a religious symbol, and most of those who are interested in its retention as a creed are not so minded because they accept all its statements, but because they are disinclined to see it discredited before the world.

It requires no courage in these days to assault the creeds, and for the most part the necessity for such procedure has quite passed away. There was a time when the Disciples held the only brief for this position, but more recently they have been joined by nearly all of the churches in their protest against human statements of doctrine, and in a demand for return to the simple oracles of God. It has been the conviction of our people from the first that the center of Christian belief is not a creed but a life, and that life the Son of God. To accept Jesus as the object of our faith, rather than a set of doctrines, has been our testimony and plea. This we have maintained

was the attitude of apostolic Christianity; and to this attitude it is essential that the Christian world return, in order that the spirit of apostolic Christianity may once more prevail, and that the Christian unity which was the ideal of the apostolic Church may be realized.

But at this very point caution is necessary, lest the preaching of Christ become in our own hands merely propositional and dogmatic. The great statement to which we have called attention as containing the apostolic confession of faith is the word of Peter: "Thou art the Messiah, the Son of the living God." This we have claimed, and still maintain, is amply sufficient for a test of belief, and therefore is all we may demand of anyone who seeks admission to the Church of Christ. But it is apparent that this confession of faith is not a mere intellectual assent to historic truth, but must have yet further value as expressing relationship to Christ and his transforming power upon character. The affirmative response to the confessional question may have no value as indicating a true attitude toward our Lord and the determination to live a Christian life. It is at this point that the Disciples have so frequently been misunderstood, or, perhaps, have left themselves liable to a

misunderstanding of their teaching. Not infrequently one hears the criticism that we as a people make nothing of regeneration or a vital Christian life, since we demand a mere assent to the statement of a historic fact or a doctrinal pronouncement. It must be conceded that the objection is valid, in so far as we do not guard with greatest care the confession of a candidate for baptism from the appearance of a mere assent to truth. There is no more value in the acceptance of the proposition that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, than in that of the more elaborate confessions of equally propositional nature. It is not the belief of a proposition that saves, but the possession of a life.

The confession of Peter was the expression of faith, of his own conviction and that of his fellow apostles, that Jesus was in very truth the Jewish Messiah whom they had been expecting and whose life had now vindicated his claim to be the Messiah, the Son of God. In that sense it was a Jewish confession, and would have had little value in the mouth of a Gentile, who knew nothing of the Messianic hopes of that people. But with Peter and the other apostles it was the utterance of a faith which laid hold of Jesus as a master and teacher,

and which recognized in him the fulfillment of those hopes and expectations which had given Israel its prophetic life. Paul, however, addressed an audience predominantly Gentile with a different phraseology, more applicable to the teaching of the Gospel in all circles, and affirms: "If thou shalt confess with thy mouth Jesus as Lord, and shalt believe in thy heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved." Here the confession of Jesus as Lord is the paramount idea. One cannot confess him as Lord without a belief in his divine character, submitting to his authority and pledging the life to the Master's service in the most unreserved manner. Such a confession is indeed more than assent to a proposition; it is an earnest attempt to incorporate the Master's life in oneself. It is this which called forth the declaration of Paul to the jailer in Philippi: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." This was no demand for assent to a proposition. It was an injunction to enter a service and accept a new programme of life. Similar and even more emphatic is the confession of faith cited by the Apostle John as an essential to Christian life, in an age when men were already beginning to question the reality of Jesus' earthly career and human character. He

affirmed that "Whosoever confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God," and that the refusal to acknowledge this real and ideal humanity of Jesus was proof of the spirit of antichrist. In this instance the Apostle has raised the Christian confession to its highest level. It is no longer a mere identification of Jesus of Nazareth with the Messiah predicted by Hebrew prophets, nor is it alone the affirmation of his divine Sonship, nor is it simply the confession of his Lordship over the soul, though all these were implied as vital principles of Christian belief; but it is the confession of the reality of his human life as the expression of the life of God in terms of flesh and blood, and therefore of the possibility and practicability of all men attempting, by the aid of that regenerating power which he supplies, to live after him the divine life in the flesh, following in the footsteps and possessing the spirit of him who was both human and divine, "God manifest in the flesh."

No confession of faith which omits these vital and necessary features of Christian faith, and gives merely an assent to truth without pledging the confessor to an earnest effort to give expression in his own life to the life of Christ, can be sufficient. Upon this principle, an ample platform, the Disciples of Christ

stand. They must inevitably fail if they cling to any doctrinal holding less ample and vital than this. This is the doctrine of apostolic Christianity: the presence of Christ as the object of faith, and that faith the all-inclusive and supreme controlling force, the result of intellectual conviction and passionate love. Here is simplicity and totality. "In this sign we conquer."

L. O. F. G.

CHAPTER XII.

APOSTOLIC CHRISTIANITY—THE ORDINANCES.

There is no clearer proof of the sharp line of demarkation between Christianity and Judaism than the fact that, though our Lord himself was reared in Jewish circles where so much was made of scene and ceremonial, and where a multitude of external observances characterized public and private worship, yet he chose only two ordinances, and those of the very simplest character, as the visible and symbolic embodiments of Christian truth, and the significant forms of Christian obedience and worship. These two ordinances were Baptism and the Lord's Supper.

Baptism was already familiar to the Jews when Jesus entered upon his ministry. At the time John began his preaching concerning the approach of the Kingdom of Heaven and the need of preparation for its reception, he adopted, by divine direction, this act

of washing the body in water as a religious rite. Baptism, in John's ministry, was a sign of purification, and it held evermore among the Christians this significance. It was not, however, that they believed the mere washing of the body had power to cleanse the soul; and the taunt on the part of the unbelievers that this was its significance, was resented by the Apostle Peter, when he declared that it was "not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the response of a good conscience toward God through the resurrection of Jesus Christ."

After the sacrificial death of Jesus, baptism acquired a new meaning, as representing in visible form the death, burial and resurrection of the Lord; and still later, its third symbolic character became apparent in the union of the believer with his Lord by being "buried with him through baptism into death; that like as Christ was raised from the dead, through the glory of the Father, so he also might walk in newness of life." Baptism, therefore, became a most precious and significant act in the early church, as embodying both the open declaration of faith and trust in Jesus and the acceptance of the obligations of his discipleship, and also as illustrating before the world his passion and triumph. It was the outward sign of the inward

grace of the regenerate life, and it was also the visible token of that knighthood into which the Christian now entered, as a soldier of Jesus Christ. Baptism was, therefore, the act invariably associated with entrance into the Christian society; and the fact that it is mentioned in every instance of conversion after the day of Pentecost proves, not that it was the most important feature of conversion, but that it was the part of the process which every one saw.

This much is simple and clear in the light of the New Testament teaching. All the baptismal controversies which have grown up in the church are the result of factors introduced later. Other so-called forms of baptism were of course unknown among the apostles, and it is perhaps impossible to know what would have been the attitude of these first proclaimers of the word if they had been confronted with those who in all sincerity had submitted to an act of a different character, which had been represented to them as Christian baptism and with which they were perfectly satisfied as an evidence of their loyalty to Christ. No such instances occurred in the New Testament. The experience of Paul with the ill-informed group whom he met at Ephesus, who had been baptized according to John's baptism, and therefore apparently regarded John as

the Messiah, affords no hint upon the question at issue. It is evident that in the case of one who has submitted to sprinkling or affusion, with the understanding that it is Christian baptism, and who asks admission into the fellowship of believers upon this evidence of Christian life, the New Testament affords no precedent or information as to proper preceeding.

There are those who regard the Christian character and the manifestation of the spirit of Christ in the life of such a person as stronger proofs of Christian standing than any conformity to an outward ordinance, and who feel that he, and not another, must be the judge of his obedience to Christ in the act of baptism. On the other hand, there are many who feel that they themselves are responsible for the conduct of their brethren in the matter of baptism; who, though they will permit the unimmersed to have fellowship with them at the community table, and elsewhere, withhold from them recognition in the formal reception of membership in the church. There are still others who believe that in every particular wherein the New Testament gives hints of procedure unimmersed believers are already recognized as members of the church of Christ by being so considered in the relations they sustain to the work of Christ in general,

and indeed in every particular except formal recognition by the "right hand of fellowship," which, as employed today, is a custom not specified in New Testament teaching. Among these various points of view it is certain that every Christian will make choice, and in accordance with the principle of Christian liberty and individual responsibility he must be answerable for his views to his Master alone. No one Christian can legislate for another upon matters of this character.

The second ordinance of the New Testament church was the Lord's Supper. In this the simple elements of bread and wine were employed to emphasize the fellowship of Jesus with his people, in a service which had both the character of a memorial and a feast of the Presence. The early disciples observed this feast as often as they came together, there being in the words of our Lord everything to encourage them to its frequent observance. Later on, as Christianity widened its field and settled to the more persistent and consecutive energies of a growing faith, the custom of meeting on the day which had been hallowed by the resurrection of the Lord was everywhere observed, so that "on the first day of the week, the disciples came together to break bread." Incidentally at

such times other exercises were enjoyed, such as the preaching of an apostle, but the purpose for which they came together was the Lord's Supper. It had the significance both of a memorial of his death and of a recognition of his presence with them, and this doctrine of the real presence is one of the essential features of the holy feast, which, though distorted by various theories, such as that of "transubstantiation," still abides as a source of power and life in this sacred institution, and wherever appropriately ministered forms a bond of strength and helpfulness to the believer. In some communions of the church, the Lord's Supper has been hedged about with sacramental significance, while in others it has been made so august and awe-inspiring that gradually the belief has prevailed that it ought not to be observed more than once or twice a year. But it is apparent that New Testament usage sanctions its frequent observance in a spirit of loving memory of the sacrificial significance of Christ's life and of reverent appreciation of his divine presence with the communicants at the sacred season of its celebration. And thus considered, every week is not too frequent a recurrence of its ministration. To those who observe it in this spirit, questions of the hour, place and method, will sink into insignificance.

nificance, and they will wait its return with that joy and reverence which should actuate those who draw near in love to their Lord. Indeed, love is the watchword of the institution, and wherever it is observed with unfailing use of the Lord's words of institution, and in the spirit of reverence and holy love, it cannot fail to have its true significance and value.

These two ordinances thus stand, not as hard and legal tasks to be set before the believer, as requiring an exact and formal obedience, but as loving and delightful acts of consecration, of imitation and fellowship, in which is seen the true significance of Christian life as a birth from above, a birth of water and the Spirit, and as a life nourished by constant impartation of the life of Christ. "Except a man be born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the Kingdom of Heaven," is the word which emphasizes the initiatory character of baptism. "Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood ye have no life in you," is the mystical and figurative statement of the necessity that the life should be constantly filled from the inexhaustible fulness of Christ. In either case, it is not the outward act alone which secures the divine blessing, but rather is the outward act the expression of an inner temper and disposition which is the secret

of union with Christ. They are therefore seen to be essential ordinances of the church, but need to be preached in a spirit which magnifies the essence and not simply the form. They are means of grace to every life. We cannot discard them, nor change them, nor empty them of their significance without being wiser than our Master and thus failing to catch his spirit, which is the essence of the Christian life. But that very spirit will lead us to speak concerning them the truth in love and to believe that every man must be fully persuaded in his own mind regarding these as other elements of Christian teaching; that we are not the keepers of our brothers' consciences, and that a spirit of confidence in each other's honesty and loyalty to Christ will be likely to lift us above the sky-line of partisanship in all questions of this character, and bring us to that unity which will itself delight to be obedient to the Savior in all the commands which he left to his followers.

CHAPTER XIII.

APOSTOLIC CHRISTIANITY—THE SPIRIT.

The plea for a return to the programme of apostolic Christianity presupposes a knowledge of the essential factors of the apostolic Church. Consideration has already been given to the sources, the doctrine and the ordinances of the primitive church. It is of equal moment to give thought to its programme of living. By this is not meant the actual record of the conduct of the early Christians; for, as might be expected in the case of believers who had so recently emerged from Judaism and heathenism, their standards of life were immature, and their behavior was accordingly often far from consistent with Christian profession. When, therefore, one speaks of the restoration of primitive Christianity, it is to its ideals as set forth in the teachings of our Lord and the Apostles that reference is made, not to the actual

conditions prevailing in the churches at Jerusalem, Antioch, Ephesus, Corinth, Rome and in Galatia.

It must not, however, be understood that the Christians of the first century did not present striking proofs of their holy calling in their lives. The New Testament is the glowing record of the radical changes wrought by the Spirit of Christ among his followers. The bearers of the new name that was first, perhaps in derision, heard upon the streets of Antioch, were a marvel to all who observed their deportment, and saw the beauty of character developed under the impress of the new life. That was the marvel of the Gospel. Those who looked on were astonished at its results. Individual life among the Christians became invested with a new significance; domestic purity and affection were conspicuous; the relations of master and servant, parents and children, husband and wife were shadowed by a new sense of holiness. Life became a consecrated thing; the commonest things were dignified and hallowed; the simplest duties were sacraments. It was this new meaning in life which astonished all observers, and made Christianity unique and impressive, a mysterious force which seemed to open to unlearned and ignorant men wells of living water which proved too

deep to be reached by all the apparatus of Greek philosophy; which give to weak and timid confessors a strength beyond the boasted power of Rome. Among the marvels of history none is greater than the change in man's view of the sacredness of life, and his holy joy in its possession, wrought by the coming of Christ. This is the perpetual change produced by the coming of the Gospel to those ignorant of its power, and the miracles of its influence may be seen on the mission fields today as in the days of the Apostles.

Yet it is not to human life that Christianity points as its vindication, for the church is ever in the process of disengaging itself from the clinging influences of the heathenism it is leaving behind. Still less would one wish to insist that the faith should be wholly judged by the conduct of those who stood at the very beginning of this purifying process, and had least of that spiritual momentum which comes from centuries of Christian history to assist them in their effort. It is rather to the Christ himself that we must look for the true ideals of the church; to his character and conduct, his teachings, his attitude, his point of view. There is not a moment in his career that does not throw light on the life he expects us to live, and the

instructions of the Apostles are only interpretations of his ideal, the guiding landmarks along the pathway that leads to the possession of "the mind that was also in Christ Jesus."

What then was the spirit of Apostolic Christianity? What are some of those ideals which it set before the world, and which must be embodied in any pronouncement which purports to represent our holy faith?

First, the animating motive was love of the Master. It is far from sufficient to say that Christ was revered as Savior and Lord, and was everywhere preached as such. That was but one side of the shield. The heart of Christianity was revealed in the passionate devotion to Jesus as one whose Gospel had indeed convinced the intellect, but much more, whose love had won the affections. Paul's rapturous devotion to the Lord whom he had never seen in the flesh is constantly revealed in those utterances which glow with the fervor of his kindled love. His references to our Lord, especially in Colossians and Ephesians, are not merely the words of a convinced believer, but of an enraptured lover. That affection which he might, or may in earlier years, have lavished upon wife or child, and of which his nature was

so full, was now wholly enlisted by that divine Friend and Master whose excellencies he could never sufficiently express. To "know him" in the intimacy of the closest fellowship was his supreme desire; to "win Christ," as a lover seeks to possess the object of his affections; to be "in Christ," not in the formal sense of joining a circle of which Christ is the center, but of gaining access to the heart of the Lord, as one enters the confidence, the affection, the heart of another, these are Paul's supreme ambitions. What is true in his case is seen also in those others of the Apostles who have left on record their thoughts regarding the Lord. The ideal of early Christianity was the possession of the spirit of Christ, his mind, his character, his point of view, his purposes and his passion to do the Father's will. The highest motive that could constrain these primitive saints was the "love of Christ," which was both his affection for them, and their ardent response. As they felt that nothing could separate them from the love of God manifested in the Master's life, so with equal and responding regard they cried, "Who shall separate us from loving Christ?"

They were also earnest students of the Scriptures, which included at that time merely the Old Testa-

ment. Those who had been Jews marveled at the new meaning seen in their ancient writings in the light of the life of Christ. These books, which before had seemed but indefinite and vague, now became luminous as foreshadowings of the Messianic work of the Master; they were *gravida Christi*, pregnant with Christ, and his ministry brought to birth all the gracious purposes of God. They not only "searched the Scriptures to see whether these things were so," but they went for daily counsel to those writings of "holy men of old, who spoke as they were impelled by the divine Spirit," conscious that they were "given for our admonition." Prayer was also an element of daily spiritual nurture, the opening of the doors of the nature to the incoming of God. This is the soul's great need. It is not "blessings" for which we need to ask, but the supreme "Blessing," the presence of God in the soul. This is the great need, whose supply leaves all other wants satisfied. Our Savior's need of prayer, and the frequent admonitions of the New Testament to "continue instant in prayer," not as a religious duty, much less as a form of words, but as an attitude of worship, and as the ever-effective means of spiritual renewal, are sufficient to point out the Christian ideal.

Such qualities cannot fail to express themselves in character, wherein a true Christianity most fully reveals itself. Not standing, but motive, disposition, nature, are the true tests. Therefore the apostolic insistence upon purity of heart as the secret of possessing the vision of God and the power of resisting evil. The life which has "risen with Christ," and has already striving within it the impulses of the realm "which is above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God," lays aside by the very necessity of its purer being the black list of unworthy motives and defiling actions, which can no more grow upon it henceforth than a nettle upon a glacier. Henceforth, by persistent effort, are banished as wild and obscene beasts not only those outward defilements which bring public reproach, but as well those defects of disposition which brought down upon the offenders our Lord's severest condemnation. It is significant that Jesus said far less of the sins which men commonly condemn than he did of pride, censoriousness, uncharitableness, pharisaism, unbrotherliness, and all the catalogue of sins which if more subtle, are more disastrous. The world itself condemns the former, while it may leave the latter to eat as a canker at the heart of character.

In a word, the emphasis of early Christianity was placed not alone upon doctrine or ordinances, but upon life, conduct, character, disposition, temper. Our Lord and the Apostles spoke of the conditions of pardon. But they also spoke, and at much greater length, of the conditions of growth in Christian life. To love God with the whole nature, as he is revealed in Jesus; to abide in daily fellowship with him through the study of the Scriptures and prayer; to maintain purity of heart and life; to keep the soul open to truth, and to have that "joy of the Lord which is strength;" to "be anxious in nothing," but to "rejoice evermore"; to cultivate the graces of thankfulness, appreciation, quietness, trust in God and expectation of good; to accept sorrow, not as the expression of God's wrath, but as the occasion for his most precious comforts; to love all men, to give oneself to hospitality, kindness and good works, "to visit the fatherless and the widow in their affliction, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world"; to believe all men capable of being saved, and to labor unceasingly for that result; to cultivate the sense of the divine Presence, and to seek the fuller possession of the Spirit in the heart, and the larger realization of his fruits in the life; in a word, to take as the themes of thought

and the ideals of life "whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honorable, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report, and whatsoever things are virtuous and praiseworthy"; this it is to possess "the mind that was in Christ Jesus," this it is to stand in that fair company who are "as lights in the world, holding forth the word of life," this it is to reproduce the spirit of apostolic Christianity.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE FORM OF CHRISTIAN UNION.

All the leaders of Christian thought in these days are prophesying that Christian unity is in process of realization, and that ultimately the Church of Christ will be one throughout the earth. The predictions as to the method of realizing this end are by no means so harmonious, however, and at this point all forecasts are likely to be errant and partial. It is unnecessary indeed that one should assume the role of prophet further than to point out some of the approaches to a solution of the question, and to indicate the futility of some methods which are urged as steps to the desired end.

It is clear that no scheme of absolute uniformity can ever be realized. Such plans have been proposed on every hand. Uniformity might take the particular curve of creed, of church organization, or of a form

of worship. In none of these directions is it possible of attainment. The creeds themselves have all been divisive in their character. The creed of Nice was a protest against Arius and resulted in division. The creed of Trent was a polemic against the Protestants. The Westminster Confession of Faith was a fulmination against the Arminians. The Thirty-nine Articles were directed against the Catholics and Independents. Even the simple Congregational confession was aimed at the Unitarians and Universalists. Any creed more elaborate than the confession of the apostolic church is incompetent to serve as a basis of unity. Nor can agreement be obtained in the matter of church government. It is perfectly impossible to harmonize in one organization those who hold to the strongly centralized forms of church organization and those of a more free and independent character. No scheme of this kind can be effective. Nor can any uniform plan of worship be devised. Even in the same denomination there will be different methods of church service, varying from the simple to the elaborate, and all of them helpful so far as they are informed by the spirit of worship. To secure such uniformity as has been described in creed, organiza-

tion or form of worship would only invite return to the old and dead uniformity of Romanism, which we have happily escaped, and for which liberty perhaps even the present division of the church is not too heavy a price to pay.

Yet any plan of Christian union which is not inclusive of those forms of Christianity which are usually considered more distant and inaccessible, such as the Episcopalian Church in America and the Established Church in England, and the Roman Catholic and Greek churches, cannot claim to be large enough. It is clear also that before this final unity can be reached the various Christian organizations must give up those things which are least characteristic of primitive Christianity and, what is more important still, must abandon those features which are least in harmony with the spirit of Christ. They must be willing to surrender that which is peculiar as a denominational characteristic for the sake of the unity of the whole church. The Roman Catholic must give up the papacy and the fiction of temporal authority. The Episcopalian of England and America must distinguish between the priestly and the prophetic functions and accord to all men the liberty of prophesy-

ing, or preaching in the apostolic sense. The pedobaptists must give up infant baptism of every form as unscriptural and divisive. The Baptist must abandon close-communion as exclusive and unfraternal, and every order of Christians must leave behind those elements of sectism which disfigure them and render impossible the unity of believers.

But that it is easy to lay down this programme and correspondingly difficult to realize it will be instantly affirmed by those who regard the present religious conditions with attention. One cannot but remember Macauley's famous saying regarding the solidarity and persistence of Roman Catholicism as a force likely to survive all present organizations of the church. One cannot but view with admiration the massive structure of the Church of England, or perceive the time-honored observance of infant baptism as it has grown up in the church, or look with interest upon the hold which close-communion has on many sections of the Baptist brotherhood. But to all such doubtings as arise from considerations like these the response may be made that we do not need to argue against papal supremacy, or episcopacy or pedobaptism, or close-communion, for the spirit of the age

and the Spirit of Christ are accomplishing their destruction. It is becoming increasingly difficult for papal power to maintain itself on the old lines. The spirit of democracy is undermining that gigantic structure with absolute certainty. There will come a time in the progress of years when certain forms will become impossible because they are out of harmony with their environment. Romanism is feeling this disintegrating force as her greatest danger. The same thing is true of the hierarchical government of the English church and the Episcopal church in America, and in due measure of other forms of episcopacy or centralization as found in others of the denominations. It is not we who have to contend against these unscriptural forms. We need not even argue the question as to whether they have been useful at certain periods in the history of the church. The fact which confronts us is their growing inutility and their consequent early decline and disappearance. Other considerations forecast the abandonment of infant baptism and close-communion. The former is being gradually given up in many of the churches where it is still maintained theoretically as a permissible and laudable as well as scriptural act,

and some form of consecration is being substituted for it. As for close-communion, it is destined to early abandonment, even by the Baptists themselves. Thus Christian unity does not seem so impossible even in its widest ranges when considered in the light of the logic of events.

The ultimate form of church organization will probably be congregational, not merely because the New Testament churches were congregational, though this was the fact, nor indeed because there is any defined scheme of church organization in the New Testament which requires this particular form, but because the plans which the Apostles used in the first century seem better suited to the needs of the entire brotherhood of believers. There is no doubt that some centralized method of church government saves much waste in the employment of Christian energy, on the part both of ministers and congregations; but this is accomplished at so great a cost in friction and discord, in the suppression of the best forces of human nature and the quickening of jealousy and strife where church authority is imposed that it can only lead in the end to the abandonment of the whole scheme of centralized government

and bring in such congregationalism as insures to every group of worshipers its absolute freedom in Christian service. When this time comes, the co-operative energies of the church will be far more largely employed than even today, with all the show of authority and supremacy which is seen. Left free in these regards the church will feel the joy of uniting its forces in free and delightful co-operative plans for social regeneration and the evangelization of the world.

The church of the future will include a far greater variety of organization, worship and doctrine than has ever yet been seen. No plan of Christian union can be conceived that does not admit these varieties, and recognize in all of them helpful and necessary expressions of that Christian liberty which is perfectly consistent with loyalty to Christ. The church of the future in its unity of spirit and service will include such seeming contraries as belief in the sovereignty of God and the freedom of the human will. It will embrace in its fellowship the man who believes in the divine transcendence and the one who emphasizes the divine immanence. It will unite in fraternal bonds the man who believes in the divine unity and the one who holds strongly to the trinitarian view. Those who insist upon the perfect humanity of Jesus and those

who are equally strong in the proclamation of his divinity will work side by side, and each will find in the other his necessary complement. The freedom of the individual Christian and the authority of the church will meet and harmonize. Individuality and solidarity will strike hands as friends. Those who emphasize reason and those who magnify faith will find that they can stand upon common ground. Science will be studied as never before, and theology will find in it a sister science and not a foe. Miracle will have its true place, and the reign of law will be discovered to suffer no shock thereby. Culture and piety will go hand in hand, and will not be ranged against each other as is now often the case. The authority of the Bible and the necessity for biblical criticism will both be recognized and each given its legitimate place in the scheme of Christian thought. In this variety will be found the surest sign of the vitality of Christianity, which like nature tends everywhere to variation and thus to growth. None of these elements is at variance with loyalty to the great verities of our holy faith, and when they are recognized in this light they cease to be sources of disquiet and vexation to Christian thinkers, and become rather aids to faith.

On the question of ordinances the same liberty will prevail. At first this liberty is likely to lead to variety of practice, and probably the subject of baptism will be the last to receive satisfactory adjustment in the scheme of a united church. Patience will be required at this point, and forbearance, perhaps more than at any other. There will be congregations which practice only immersion and admit to fellowship only such as have been immersed, There will be those who practice only immersion, but will admit to their membership those who have submitted to sprinkling or pouring as baptism, upon the ground that the individual must be responsible for this obedience to the Lord. There will be still others who use immersion, sprinkling and pouring indiscriminately and hold no particular testimony upon the form of baptism so-called. But in this matter as in those of government and creed it is impossible to escape the conclusion that as the church develops in the spirit of unity and the particular denominational barriers are broken away, there will be a more general recognition of the apostolic practice in the matter of baptism, and less tendency to maintain for traditional reasons other practices which have no authority in holy writ. At the

same time the church universal will more and more place emphasis upon individual responsibility as the determining factor in this as in other particulars. Man must be permitted to make his own choice between apostolic and non-apostolic practice, and to assume responsibility for his conduct. Christian liberty and individual accountability must be everywhere recognized.

It need scarcely be urged that such drawing together of Christian forces will result in an economy of service in the home and foreign fields such as has never yet been possible, and perhaps it is the demand for unity which the missionary work makes upon the church that will tend to hasten the consummation more than any other motive. Where men are falling down before idols of wood and stone, it seems nothing less than tragic that Christian teaching should assume various and contradictory forms. And scarcely less tragic do such differences appear in our own land, and especially in our great cities, where men are falling down before the idols of the market-place, and losing their faith in Christ because of the enmities of his people. The pleas of missionaries in foreign fields that the church should find a common basis upon which to stand, and the imperative necessity for unity

presented by the exigencies of city mission work not only demand the attempt to accomplish such unity, but are themselves the predictions that it will come to reality.

We shall see this unity accomplished not all at once but gradually and by the pervasion of the church with the real purpose of the Gospel, and the mind that was in Christ Jesus. Denominations may unite from time to time; indeed they are uniting in ways which half a century ago would have seemed unaccountable. Churches are federating for the purpose of Christian service, and this should be accomplished in a far more extensive manner than has yet been undertaken. Conventions ought to be held for the promotion of Christian unity by every means. But by none of these methods will the final unity of the church come about, though all will serve as means to that end. In the last issue it can only be brought to pass by the increase of the spirit of love among the people of our Lord, that spirit which recognizes the mind of the Master wherever it is exhibited, which sees that the things which unite are far more vital than the things which divide, and that the great unities of our holy faith have already been set forth by Paul, the most distinguished of apostolic advo-

cates of Christian union, whose great classic on the subject needs to be repeated again and again, until it becomes a sort of private and public confession of faith and a molding influence on every Christian life: "I, therefore, a prisoner in the Lord, beseech you to walk worthily of the calling wherewith ye are called; with all lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering, forbearing one another in love; giving diligence to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, even as also ye were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all; * * * till we all attain unto the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a full-grown man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ."

CHAPTER XV.

CHRISTIAN UNITY—AN APPEAL.

The Disciples of Christ have now some three-quarters of a century of history. During all this time they have made clear and explicit proclamation of two great, and as they conceive, neglected, factors in the life of the church, viz., Christian unity and the programme of the apostolic church. During this time, by insistence upon these factors, not a little change has been wrought in the sentiment of the Christian world. There is much more interest shown today in the feasibility of Christian union than ever before. There is also a real earnestness seen in all the churches in an effort to find out what was the actual teaching of the New Testament, and to go back to Christ. The credit for this change is not entirely ours, and yet no doubt we have had a marked influence in calling the attention of the Christian world to these things.

These two truths stand as the central features of our pronouncement. No one would undertake to deny that they have been prominent in our preaching from the first. At least it may be said that apostolic Christianity has been our most vigorous watchword, and that Christian unity was understood to lie somewhere in the vicinity as a matter to be insisted upon at all appropriate moments. But at this point the question arises, Do we quite understand what apostolic Christianity involves? Have we not tended to reduce it to a formula which is too small to contain all the facts the New Testament reveals? Certainly apostolic Christianity embraced the preaching of faith, repentance and baptism, but it embraced very much more than this. These are really not "first principles," but subordinate to the great first principles of the Gospel—the love of God, the redemptive work of the Savior, the character of the Church as the visible embodiment and instrument of the Kingdom of God, the necessity of regeneration and the development of character as the proof of the Christ-like life, as well as obedience to our Lord in the declaration of faith and in baptism. Considering the variety of types of thought manifested in the New Testament, is it true that in our proclamation of apostolic Chris-

tianity we have given a sufficiently ample interpretation of what that Christianity was, not in its real manifestations among the raw and untrained churches of the first century, but in its ideals as exhibited in the teaching of our Lord and his apostles? Have we set forth in the fullest manner the teaching, the ordinances and the spirit of the apostolic church?

Again, regarding the principle of Christian unity: Have we sufficiently taken into consideration the problem involved in seeking to call the attention of the church universal to the practicability of a closer union of the people of God? Has not our pronouncement tended to be narrow and provincial in many instances, owing to the fact that we have an inadequate conception of what the ultimate Christian unity will be? Are we expecting that the whole Christian world will come into our fellowship? If so, is it likely we, or any other generation, shall see this realized? If we do not expect this, but content ourselves with saying, "We do not ask them to come to us, but to come to Christ," but at the same time hold in reserve the feeling that if they will come to Christ they will find us already there, and that this will amount to the same thing as their joining our church, are we not

also deceiving ourselves as to the real facts? For we need, perhaps, to make as much concession in our disposition and spirit as others in their forms of teaching and practice.

In other words—What are we doing as a people to realize the Christian unity of which we have evermore spoken? Is it not time that we were giving practical expression to this watchword, which it is to be feared is in danger of becoming merely a shibboleth, with no vital relation to our work? It is certainly not enough for us to preach the sentiment of Christian unity in the seclusion of our churches. There must be some practical expression of the spirit in the communities where we have existence, or we shall become the jest of the religious world, a people insisting upon Christian unity, but the most reluctant to enter upon its realization. Is it not possible to remedy this defect, and give our work a seriousness of purpose in the eyes of those to whom our appeal is to be made, by a change of attitude in this very particular? In any given community the Disciples of Christ should be the most enthusiastic advocates and promoters of all united Christian effort. Union evangelistic services are eminently practicable, and in several places these meetings have been organized under

the leadership of the Disciples with the best possible results to the entire Christian community; and the result has been to emphasize the real interest of our people in such fellowship as brings the forces of the Cross into co-operation. If there are those of our number who hesitate to engage in these union services from disinclination to appear as advocates or apologists for what is done in some of these meetings, let them reflect on the alternative loss of all testimony by absence, and the disapproval likely to follow such conduct in the judgment of other communions. It is the conviction of those of our preachers who have had most experience that we have nothing to lose and everything to gain by hearty and cordial participation in all such endeavors, and that our presence is of itself often effective in preventing those grotesque features of revivalism which have grown obsolete in the more intelligent communities, but which wherever used tend to bring religion into low esteem in the minds of thoughtful people. Such practices as the mourner's bench, the storming of heaven for favorable disposition toward sinners, the insistence upon a glowing and spectacular "experience," and the belief in the mechanical action of the Holy Spirit upon the unconverted, become impossible

where our people are admitted as helpers, even without protest on their part. It is a result for which to be grateful that such an influence for good can be exerted by co-operation. On the other hand there are no methods calculated to reach the results of personal acceptance of the Christ, such as the use of the after-meeting, the inquiry-room and individual labors with the unsaved, in which we cannot heartily engage. It is not alone a question of joining with our religious neighbors. We should be the first to propose and the most active in securing such united evangelistic services, and even where the evangelist is not of our choice, and does not preach what we believe to be the "whole gospel," we are still vastly the gainers by the plan, not only in the numbers added to our churches, which is not the most important feature, but as well by our influence throughout the meetings. Moreover we need to remember that no people is so well prepared as are we to produce evangelists of the first order, whose services shall be in demand for united evangelistic meetings. The type of evangelism is constantly improving, and the grotesque features so much deprecated will soon become obsolete. It is ours to supply the men needed for this service, men

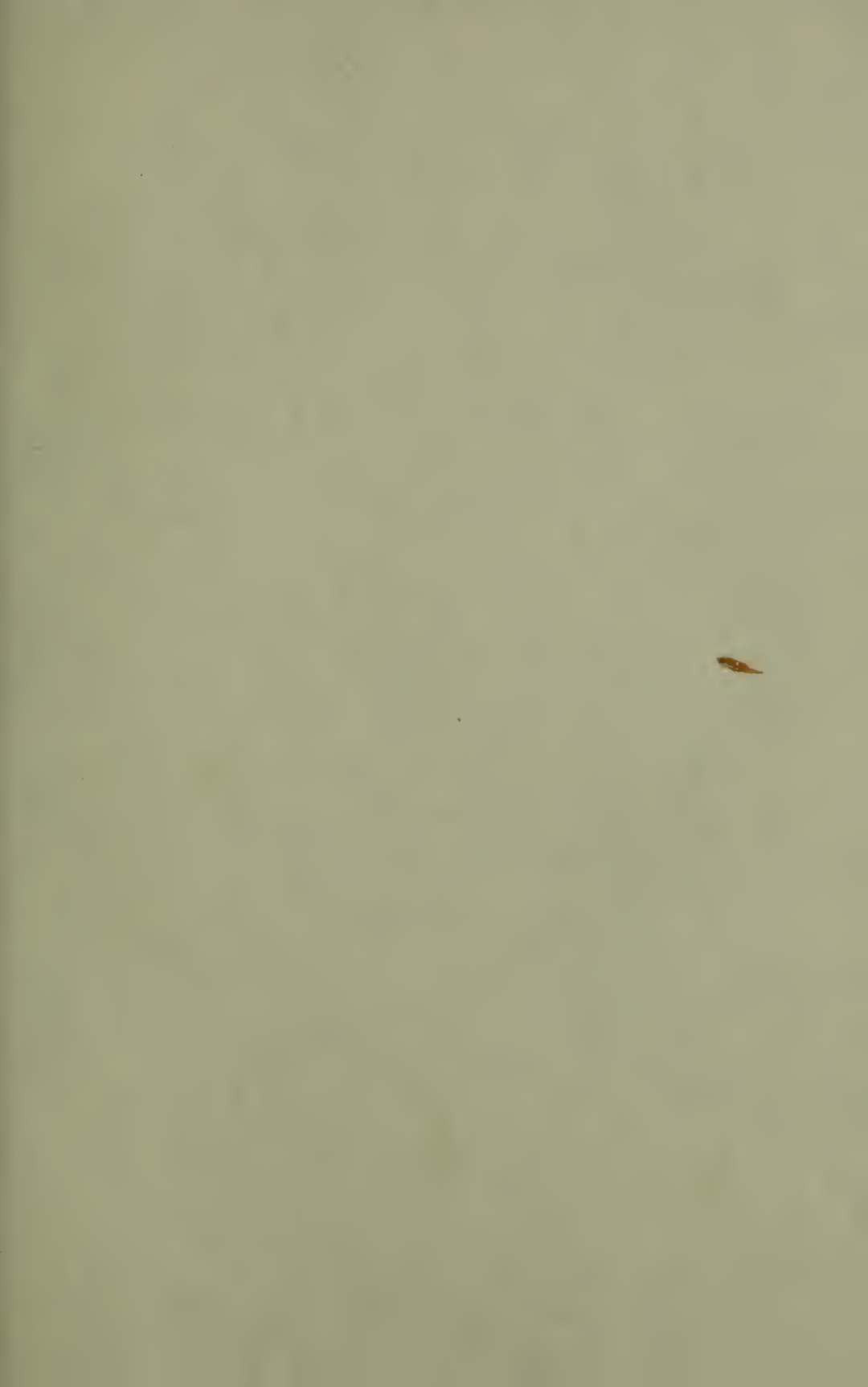
who combine a broad and clear view of the truth with the ability to speak that truth in love.

Again, in several places the Disciples have organized and carried to successful issue biblical lecture courses, which were attended by the members of all the churches in the community, including Episcopalian and Roman Catholic as well as many forms of dissent and skepticism, with the result of deepening Christian faith, of removing objections to Christianity, and of cementing the fellowship of those who love our Lord. In two or three instances one of our congregations, in the absence of its pastor, has invited a neighboring congregation to come and worship with it, bringing its own preacher; and the impression made was most happy and fraternal. In other cases congregations of our brethren have invited to a banquet the pastors and official members of all the churches of the community, and the results of such gatherings have been most notable in securing a new standing for our people in those cities, and emphasizing their real interest in the union of all Christians. In other instances the Disciples have taken active lead in movements for civic righteousness and social regeneration. In all these ways the real pur-

pose of our work has been emphasized and illustrated. Only by such methods can we ever attain the place to which our principles entitle us, and most of all, which we are competent to fill as the living exponents of Christian unity in the localities where we have representation.

It may be said that by these methods of fellowship we shall lose our testimony, and simply give aid and comfort to the sectarian world by appearing to approve of their present methods and teaching. The answer is obvious. We all recognize our denominational friends as brethren in Christ, equally zealous with us for the promotion of Christian life in the community, and only lacking some features which we believe inherent in New Testament teaching to be fully obedient to our Lord. How shall we best gain their confidence and impress them with whatever truth we hold save by such manifestations of fraternal regard as give us the right to speak to them in behalf of the great truths we hold? Moreover it is apparent that the very types of united work to which reference has been made afford us the best possible means of emphasizing in a loving, and yet uncompromising, spirit, those truths which we hold to be vital to Christian life. We shall never be less loyal by such manifes-

tations of a friendly spirit, and we shall at the same time gain for ourselves a record both as living embodiments of the spirit of the Master, and as possessing a testimony which is practicable and may find adequate expression in the life of the entire Christian community. We shall by this means, and apparently by this means alone, come to be taken seriously as a people not only with a watch-word but with the ability and earnestness to make that watch-word real in the communities where we exist. For such an enterprise as this no better moment can be found than the present. Shall we not turn the unmeasured strength of our organization, which has been rapidly maturing during the past years, to the accomplishment of the great purpose with which we began our life?







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